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SERMONS

ON

Several Subjects,

BY

The Rev^d. *W. REAY*, M. A.
Lecturer of *Wandsworth*;
Late of *Queen's-College* in the
University of *Oxford*.

With a RECOMMENDATORY PREFACE
By *T. CHURCH*, D. D.
Vicar of *Battersea*, and Prebendary of *St. Paul's*.

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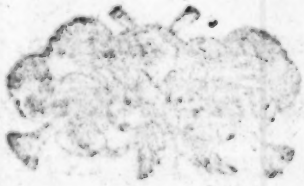

PREFACE

TO

SERMONS

THE PREFACE.

MR. REAY *having desired me to give him a short Introduction to the following Discourses, I cannot refuse so small a Request to a Friend for whom I have great Pity and good Wishes. I beg Leave therefore to detain the Reader a little from the Perusal of the Sermons, to make him acquainted with the Reason and Design of their Publication. There is something very peculiar in the Author's Case and Circumstances, which has in a Manner compelled him to a Method, which otherwise he would have wished to decline.*

He has been for some Years employed in the sacred Function; it may be truly

ſaid, with equal Credit to himſelf and Advantage to his Hearers. He was edu. ated at Queen's-College *in* Oxford, *under my worthy Friend Dr.* Fothergill, *the preſent Principal of* Edmund-Hall. *By him he came recommended to me in the Year* 1745, *and behaved very faithfully and diligently as my Curate for three Years. After which he was invited to the Curacy and Lecture of* Wandſworth, *under Mr.* Alliſon *the preſent Vicar, in which Situation he has continued ever ſince. To the Gentlemen here mentioned, as alſo to the other Inhabitants in theſe Pariſhes, as well as the adjacent ones of* Clapham *and* Putney, *where he is well known, we refer any Perſon, who deſires more Satisfaction, and will take the Trouble of enquiring, for a Teſtimony of his Principles, Morals, and good Character in general. He has received too many Favours and Kindneſſes from them, to ſuffer him to doubt of their Readi-*

Readineſs to do him Juſtice on this Occaſion.

I muſt now come to the melancholy Part of his Caſe, which indeed has occaſioned the above Recital. He has frequently laboured under ſevere Diſorders: But within the laſt half Year it has pleaſed God to afflict him with a painful, dangerous Illneſs, a violent Effuſion of Blood, from a Rupture of the Veſſels in the Lungs; which has reduced him to ſuch a Degree of Weakneſs, that he is entirely diſabled, and muſt be ſo at leaſt for ſome Time, from appearing either in the Desk or Pulpit; and that he is obliged to procure conſtant Aſſiſtance, at the Expence of by far the greater Part of an Income, which is itſelf precarious, which in Time of Health was only a decent Support, and which, if entire, would hardly be equal to the neceſſary Demands of Sickneſs.

An honeſt and worthy Man then, thus viſited by the Hand of God, who never had any Beneſice, who never could pretend to any Fortune, takes this Meam of ſoliciting the Favour of the Opulent, the Pious, and the Liberal. In order to provide ſome neceſſary Supplies under his preſent Calamity, and to guard againſt the Diſtreſs which threatens him, he has been adviſed by his Friends to publiſh this Volume, and thus to make his unfortunate Caſe more generally known. And he is encouraged to hope for Succeſs in this Application, from reflecting on the numberleſs Inſtances of Generoſity, which he hath obſerved, and even in ſome Meaſure experienced, and that particular Genius of Beneficence, which ſo honourably diſtinguiſhes the preſent Age.

As to the Sermons, I ~~ſhall ſay~~ cannot say any ~~another friend of his says has had the~~ *little.* They are now before the World, they muſt ſpeak for themſelves. *It would,*

trouble of ~~thing~~ carrying y^m thro the preſs. and beſides, as

I know, be ſome Alleviation to the Author's Misfortunes, and ſome Satisfaction to his Mind, if they ſhould prove any Ways inſtrumental in doing Good to Mankind, in evincing the Doctrines, and enforcing the Duties of Chriſtianity; in making the former more generally received, and the latter more uniformly practiſed. And in this Reſpect, I cannot but expreſs my Hopes, that he will attain his Deſire; and that while this Preface beſpeaks Commiſeration for himſelf, the Diſcourſes will be ſtill more highly uſeful to thoſe who read them.

Indeed, the Author does not pretend to have deſigned them for the Preſs, when they were compoſed. Nor will his preſent Infirmities permit him to attend to the correcting and publiſhing them with that Care and Exactneſs, which is due to the Public. He deſires they may be conſidered, as plain, ſerious, well-intended, edifying Sermons. With this

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Character of them he will be well content. I will therefore conclude, with intreating the good-natured and Chriſtian Reader to overlook any little Inaccuracies he may meet with, and both to conſider Mr. Reay's *Caſe with Compaſſion, and to peruſe his Works with Candor.*

Batterſea, Feb. 14,
1755.

THO. CHURCH.

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SERMON I.

DEUT. XXIX. 29.

The ſecret Things belong unto the Lord our God; but thoſe Things which are revealed belong unto us.

A RESTLESS Curioſity about explaining and underſtanding the Myſteries of Religion, has ever been attended with very pernicious, and dangerous Conſequences. When Men, not content with plain and obvious Truths, have ventured to launch out into unknown and unfathomable Depths, they immediately go beyond the Line of their Underſtanding, the farther they advance in their Enquiries, the more Difficulties do they meet with, and are infinitely more perplexed at the End, than at the Beginning of them. At laſt fatigued and tired out with the unprofitable Purſuit, and

finding no Degree of Satisfaction in it, they grow wavering and doubtful about all religious Principles; the Reſult of which Doubting generally terminates in downright Scepticiſm. For thoſe who will not believe any Thing but what they underſtand, tho' the Truth of it comes confirmed by divine Authority, and yet who experience upon Trial, that they underſtand but a very little, are in a fair Way of diſbelieving every Thing relating to divine Matters, and of calling in queſtion the very Being and Attributes of God. And indeed conſidering how inadequate thoſe Conceptions are which we form of the Deity, and how little our finite Minds are able to comprehend of an infinite, eternal Being; 'tis no wonder, that whenever we attempt to explain his Nature, and the Manner of his Exiſtence, or to account for the ſeveral Diſpenſations of his Providence, we ſhould be loſt and bewildered in the fruitleſs Search, and find no ſure Footing whereon to reſt our Enquiries. For as the wiſe Man obſerves, hardly do we gueſs aright at Things that are upon Earth, and with Labour do we find the Things that are before us; but the Things that are in Heaven, who hath ſearched out? Theſe are infinitely out of the Reach of our ſhort-ſighted Underſtandings, and we no

ſooner

ſooner endeavour to trace them, than our Heads grow giddy, and all immediately runs into Perplexity and Confuſion. It is our Happineſs, that whatever Things are neceſſary in order to our Salvation, require no great Reach of Thought to comprehend, but are as clear to the Ignorant as to the Learned, and want only an honeſt, unprejudiced Mind, to make our Enquiries about them plain and ſatisfactory. And as to thoſe Diſpenſations of Providence, which appear to us intricate and perplexed, and which we cannot at preſent account for; it is enough to ſatisfy us that they are right, and as they ſhould be, when we know they are the Diſpenſations of that Being whom we call God, all whoſe Ways are conducted by the infallible Rules of infinite, unerring Wiſdom. What that Being has revealed to us concerning himſelf and his Will, we are modeſtly to acquieſce in, not preſuming to explain the Manner how they are, nor the Reaſons of his Conduct in every particular Inſtance. If the Myſterioufneſs of them can ſerve no other Purpoſe, it may ſerve to humble our Pride, and bring us to a better Senſe of our own Weakneſs and Ignorance: But to affect being wiſe above what is revealed, to endeavour to unravel the whole

Scheme of Providence, and to make our finite and limited Underſtandings the Standard whereby to judge of the divine Proceedings, is acting much above our Sphere, and is an Undertaking much too arduous and complicated for our narrow Capacities. Our proper Buſineſs is to attend to ſuch Truths as are clearly revealed, as are deſigned to influence our Practice, and reform our Manners. For *the ſecret Things belong unto the Lord our God, but thoſe Things which are revealed belong unto us.* In enlarging upon which Words, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

I. That there are certain Secrets in the divine Diſpenſations, which can never be unfolded by human Underſtanding, and which only are the Objects of divine Knowledge. *The ſecret Things belong unto the Lord our God.*

II. That all we have to do is, to take Things as they are revealed, and to govern both our Faith and Practice according to that Revelation. *But thoſe Things which are revealed belong unto us.* And,

I. We are to ſhew, that there are certain Secrets in the divine Diſpenſations, which can never be unfolded by human Underſtanding, and which only are the Objects of divine Knowledge. *The ſecret Things belong unto*

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the Lord our God.---In unravelling Secrets of this Kind, there have not been wanting Men of vain Imaginations, whom an idle Curioſity and an unaccountable Impatience of being ignorant of any Thing, have carried to employ their Thoughts. They have pitched upon different Subjects that are equally out of their Reach, according to their different Way of thinking, or their particular Humours and Diſpoſitions for the Matter of their Enquiry. Some are buſied in finding out Reaſons why God did not create this World ſooner, inaſmuch as they think, that as it was the Theatre upon which ſeveral Sorts of Beings were to enjoy Exiſtence, and ſuch a Degree of Happineſs as was ſuited to their Natures, it would have been more conſiſtent with the Goodneſs of the Deity to have put them in the Poſſeſſion of that Happineſs as ſoon as poſſible, and not have ſuffered them to have continued in a State of Non-exiſtence till the Days of *Adam*. For they cannot conceive but that in an Eternity of Ages, there muſt have been numberleſs Opportunities for the Creation of the World, and conſequently no Need for deferring it, till ſo late a Period. But ſuch would do well to conſider, that at whatever Time the World had been created, the ſame Difficulty

would ſtill have occurred: For let this World have roſe into Being at any conceivable Period ever ſo far back, yet there would always have been an Eternity paſt, into the Idea of which, the relative Term *ſooner* can by no Means be admitted, as it only refers to Time, which had a Beginning, and will conſequently have an End. So that to enquire into the Reaſons, why God did not create this World ſooner, is to enquire into Things, of which we cannot poſſibly have any Ideas. We are immediately loſt, when we extend our Thoughts to the Examination of Subjects which are any Way connected with Eternity, and find all our Reaſonings upon them vain and inconcluſive: They are Depths which our finite Underſtandings will never be able to fathom; and thoſe who are ſo preſumptuous as to attempt them, will ever be convinced, to the Mortification of their Pride, that they are further from Satisfaction at the End of their Enquiries, than they were at the Beginning.

Others there are, who waving all Diſquiſitions about the Creation of the World, have confined their Enquiries, to ſome Difficulties relating to Man. That he ſhould be placed in a State of Innocence, and yet be made liable to forfeit it by an Abuſe of Free-will, has often-

times

times furniſhed them with Matter for vain Diſputation: They ſometimes are apt to think, that it would have been better for Man, not to have been endowed with Free-will at all, than to have been capable of uſing it ſo much to his Prejudice, and that he had better have been a neceſſary Agent directed only by Inſtinct, than a free and rational Creature, poſſeſſed of Judgment and Underſtanding. But ſuch may as well enquire, why Man was created at all? For to make him Man, he muſt have been endowed with theſe very Powers, with Reaſon and Free-will; Since had he been deſtitute of them, he would have belonged to ſome other Species of Creatures, beſides the human. Indeed Worms, or other the moſt inconſiderable Reptiles, may with the ſame Reaſon aſk, why they were not made Men, as Men ſhould aſk, why they were not made otherwiſe than they are, poſſeſſed of other Powers and Faculties. The ſame God made both them and all other Creatures, and placed them in ſuch particular Situations in the Scale of Beings, as were ſuited to their particular Natures. He ſaw it neceſſary, that ſome ſhould be diſtinguiſhed by Reaſon and Free-will, and that ſome ſhould be deſtitute of them; but that all ſhould be placed in ſuch Situations, as that their Exiſtence might be an

Happineſs to them, and that they might be poſſeſs'd of ſuch Powers and Faculties, as wou'd qualify them for the Enjoyment of it. For as far as our Obſervation can carry us, we find every Creature is form'd of ſuch a Nature and Conſtitution, as that every Accommodation is ſupplied him in that Circle of Being wherein he moves, and all his Powers of what ſort ſoever, have proper Objects whereupon to exerciſe themſelves. So that the Queſtion ought not to be, why Man was created a free Agent, but why he was created at all? For if Free-will and other intellectual Faculties are what conſtitute him Man, are what diſtinguiſh him from the Brute-Creatures; and if theſe Faculties are capable of contributing to his Happineſs, we have no Buſineſs to enquire, why he was created with them. The moſt material Enquiry of all, is, whether or no we have uſed thoſe Faculties properly with which we were created; or in other Words, whether we have anſwered the End of our Creation, and have acted agreeably to the Rank which we hold in the Scale of Beings, or to the ſeveral Relations we bear both to God and our Fellow-creatures.

All other Queſtions about our being what we are, about our Freedom of Choice, and Capacity

pacity for abuſing it, are Queſtions which we are not concerned in, and which we ſhall never be able to reſolve. They contain in them Secrets, which belong only unto the Lord, which no finite Underſtanding can ever diſcover, and which were never intended for matters of human Enquiry.—There are other Diſpenſations likewiſe of the Deity relating to Religion and the ſeveral Revelations of his Will, which Men of an inquiſitive Turn have employed their Thoughts about. They are at a Loſs to know, why God ſhou'd make the *Jews* his favourite People, why he ſhou'd give them a Law, as a Rule of their Conduct, while other Nations greater and mightier than they, were left in a State of Ignorance and Error: And with regard to the Goſpel-Revelation, it ſeems ſtrange to them, that, as it is calculated for the Benefit of all Mankind, the Knowledge of it is not made univerſal, and extended to the whole human Race. But as well may ſuch aſk, why all Men are not born with the ſame natural Parts, or why God has not made them all equal in every Reſpect: For no doubt but all Men have the ſame Right to theſe particular Advantages of Parts and Circumſtances, as they have to the Jewiſh or Chriſtian Revelation; and yet, I believe, but very few

have

have enquired into the Reaſons of ſuch a Difference being made. God's Ways of proceeding both in the natural and moral World, are dark and intricate, and traced in vain by our finite and limited Underſtandings. We ſee things diſpenſed in this, or that manner; but the Reaſons of theſe ſeveral Diſpenſations are entirely concealed from us. But as we know that they are all conducted and managed by a wiſe and good Providence, though we do not perceive the particular Reaſons of them, we may be very well ſatisfied that they are right and as they ſhou'd be, and are much better ordered, than if we ourſelves had the Diſpoſal of them.

It wou'd be endleſs to mention the Diſputes that have been raiſed about the Divine Decrees, about Election and Reprobation: How have ſome puzzled themſelves in endeavouring to reconcile Foreknowledge in God with Freewill in Man; and how have others too curiouſly pryed into the Myſtery of the Trinity and our Redemption by Chriſt? Yet what have they gained by their Enquiries into theſe myſterious Subjects, but this mortifying Piece of Knowledge, that the two prevailing Ingredients in their Compoſition are Pride and Ignorance? The Truth is, whenever Men extend their Reaſonings to

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matters relating to the Deity, to his Nature and his manner of Acting, they extend them further than they have any ſure Grounds to go upon. They have no Ideas of God but what are borrowed from material and ſenſible Objects, or from what they feel within themſelves; and theſe muſt be quite inadequate when applied to a ſpiritual eternal Being: For as ſoon may we ſuppoſe *Finite* can contain Infinite, as that our narrow and limited Underſtandings can comprehend the Divine Proceedings or the particular Reaſons of them. Leaving therefore theſe Secrets and Myſteries as only Objects of Divine Wiſdom and Knowledge, and by no means ſuited to the human Underſtanding, we will proceed to ſhew,

Secondly, That all we have to do, is, to take Things as they are revealed, and to govern both our Faith and Practice according to that Revelation. *But thoſe Things which are revealed belong unto us.* As to Matters of Faith, ſuch Doctrines as propoſe themſelves to us as Articles of Belief, we are immediately to embrace them upon the Word and Authority of God. When once we are ſatisfied from the Evidence they bring along with them that God is their Author, and that they proceed from him, all further Enquiry concerning them, may then be look'd upon as entirely

entirely needleſs. For the Myſteriouſneſs of any Doctrine ought to be no ſort of Objection againſt the Truth of that Doctrine, or at all leſſen the Credibility of it, ſo long as we have all the Evidence that the Nature of the Thing will admit of, that it is of Divine Original. If then any Doctrines of a myſterious Nature are propoſed to us as Articles of Faith, we are not to diſpute the Truth of them becauſe of their Myſteriouſneſs, but we are only to enquire whether God has revealed them. When once we come to be ſatisfied of this, all other Difficulties about their Myſteriouſneſs, are entirely to be diſregarded. 'Tis true, we are not to believe things that are contrary to our Reaſon, but then we may believe things above our Reaſon; eſpecially when the Truth of them is ſupported by Divine Authority. For there is a wide Difference betwixt our believing things that are contrary to our Reaſon, and believing things that are above it. Thoſe that are contrary to it, God never requires us to believe throughout the whole Revelation of his Will; but thoſe things that are above it, he frequently propoſes to us as Matters of Faith; which is no more, than that we ſhou'd ſubmit our Reaſon to the Will of God, and depend upon his Truth and Veracity, with regard to things which we cannot underſtand. And ſurely there is nothing

thing unreaſonable in ſuch a Submiſſion and Dependance: For if we believe God to be what he is, that is, a Being of all poſſible Perfection, we muſt believe that whatever he reveals to us, however myſterious it may ſeem to be, is certainly true, ſince Truth and Faithfulneſs muſt ever be reckoned amongſt his Perfections. I do not know what Notions thoſe Men muſt have of the Perfections of the Deity, who will believe him no further than they can underſtand him, and who will make their Reaſon the Standard whereby to judge of all his Diſpenſations. It wou'd be time enough for them to arrogate ſo much to themſelves, when they cou'd account for ſeveral obvious Truths which ſcarce ever have been diſputed: The Union of Soul and Body, for Inſtance, is a Point generally agreed upon; and will not theſe Men believe that they have any Souls, becauſe they cannot underſtand how this Union is effected? For that Matter and Spirit ſhou'd be united in the ſame Perſon, is a Truth as much above their Reaſon and Comprehenſion, as any Myſtery in Revelation whatſoever. The ſmalleſt Particle of Matter contains Myſteries in it as much above their Reaſon, as any Myſteries in Divine Revelation: So that according to their own Prin-

ciples, they muſt not only diſbelieve the Myſteries of Revelation, becauſe they cannot comprehend them; but likewiſe diſbelieve almoſt every thing elſe, ſince there is hardly any thing in the World which does not abound in Myſteries that are equally incomprehenſible.

There muſt be a ſtrange Mixture of Pride and Ignorance in the Compoſition of ſuch Men that can make them act in ſo inconſiſtent and irrational a Manner. Their Pride will not let them allow that they are ignorant of any thing; and at the ſame Time their Ignorance contradicts their Pride, and forces them to acknowledge the Vanity of their Pretenſions. It would certainly much better become ſuch weak and frail Creatures to ſubmit their Reaſon to the Myſteries of Divine Revelation, rather than expect that the Myſteries of Divine Revelation ſhou'd ſtoop to their Reaſon; eſpecially ſince they may be ſure, that whatever is delivered in that Revelation, is ſtrictly according to Truth, however myſterious it may appear to their ſhort-ſighted Underſtandings. In a Word, it belongs to Man to believe, whatever God thinks fit to reveal, and not to diſpute the Truth of that Revelation, becauſe there are ſome things in it that are hard to be underſtood; but to bring every ſtubborn, rebel-

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lious Thought, every Imagination that vainly exalteth itſelf, to the Obedience of Faith.

And with regard to Practice, Revelation is certainly the ſureſt Guide we have to go by. Let us but attend to what it delivers, and we ſhall not be miſtaken about any fundamental Parts of our Duty. Every thing that pertaineth to Life and Godlineſs is there laid down in the plaineſt and moſt eaſy manner, and recommended to our Obſervance by the ſtrongeſt and moſt intereſting Motives. If we apply to the ancient Moraliſts for a Rule of Action to govern our Lives by, we ſhall find them deficient in both Reſpects: Their beſt Schemes of Ethicks are deſtitute of a ſufficient Obligation to enforce Obedience, and the Motives to that Obedience are weak and ineffectual. Abſtract moral Excellence, or the preſent Convenience attending a vertuous Behaviour, was the only Inducement they had to the Performance of their Duty. For we do not find that they ever derived their Obligation to Virtue from the Will of God, or that they enforced the Practice of it upon the Conſciences of Men from the Conſequences that wou'd follow the Obſervance, or Non-Obſervance of it in a future State. Theſe are Advantages peculiar to the Goſpel-Revelation, which render

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the Scheme of Morality contained in it, much more perfect and complete than any other Scheme whatſoever. And yet notwithſtanding this, there have been, and, I am afraid, are not wanting Men, who declare that they do not ſee the Neceſſity of Revelation to improve Morality; ſince in their Opinion, there was as perfect a Scheme of it to be found in the heathen Moraliſts, as in the Doctrines of Chriſt and his Apoſtles. One is at a Loſs to gueſs with what View Men make theſe Declarations, unleſs it be that they want to deſtroy Morality itſelf, by leſſening the Authority of the Goſpel-Revelation: For they very well know, or at leaſt might know, that if the ſuperior Authority of the Goſpel-Revelation was once ſet aſide, there wou'd be little or no Obligation to the Practice of Morality; inaſmuch as that is chiefly derived from the Goſpel. So that ſuch Men's crying up the heathen Moraliſts, is not that they have any real Regard for them, but only that they may degrade with a better Grace the Doctrines of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, and by that Means may ſet themſelves at Liberty from all Reſtraints of Religion and Conſcience. How muſt it have moved the Indignation of theſe great Men, of *Socrates* and *Plato*, of *Epictetus* and *Antoninus*, of *Seneca*

neca and *Tully*, to have heard their Names and Writings proſtituted to ſuch vile Purpoſes, to have ſeen them made a Pretence for undermining the moſt perfect Syſtem of Morality that ever appeared in the World; and all this done with a Deſign to defeat the very End, which theſe great Men were all along labouring at? For it was their chief Buſineſs to advance the Cauſe of Religion and Vertue, to make Men more honeſt, more juſt, more temperate; to make them better Neighbours, better Friends, and better and more uſeful Members of Society: Whereas the Buſineſs of their pretended Admirers, is, to introduce amongſt Mankind an unbounded Licentiouſneſs of Manners, to give an unreſtrained Scope to their Appetites and Paſſions, and to make their Reaſon become obedient to the ſenſual Part; to their deprav'd Inclinations. In ſhort, theſe ancient Sages, who made it their Employment to inſtruct Mankind, wou'd have rejoiced to have ſeen that received and embraced, which our modern Freethinkers take ſo much Pains to vilify and bring into Diſrepute; wou'd have rejoiced to have ſeen a Revelation from Heaven, the Want of which they ſo much lamented; which ſets the moral Duties in the plaineſt and cleareſt Light, and enforces the Obſer-

vance of them by the ſtrongeſt and moſt engaging Motives; which teaches Men to deny all Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World, by which they wou'd infallibly ſecure to themſelves in the Next an exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.

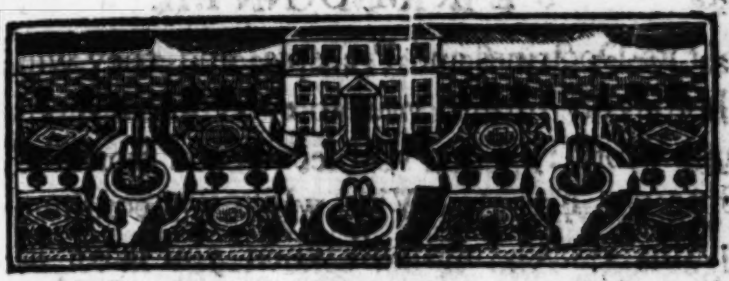
We are in Poſſeſſion of that very Revelation, which contains and teaches all this: It belongs to us therefore to make a right Uſe and Improvement of it, and to grow better and wiſer by the Inſtructions it affords us. If it teaches us more fully and clearly the ſeveral Duties which we owe to God, our Neighbour, and ourſelves, it belongs to us, according as we are taught, to ſerve and obey God with all our Heart, and with all our Soul; to benefit our Neighbour according to our Abilities and Opportunities; and to treat ourſelves as Creatures, who are compounded of two Parts, Body and Spirit, and accordingly to take Care that each of them act in their proper Sphere, the Spirit command, and the Body obey. If in order to make us good, it applies to both our Hopes and Fears; if our Hopes are animated and encouraged by the enlivening Proſpect of Heaven, we ſhould be excited thereby to qualify ourſelves for the Enjoyment of it; and if our Fears are alarmed by

by the awakening Notices of Hell, of a future Judgment, we are to regulate and govern our Lives accordingly, and not ſuffer theſe great Truths to be thrown away upon us. For in vain are we taught theſe Things by the Chriſtian Revelation, if they do not influence our Practice, and reform our Manners; if they do not make us better Men, more juſt, and charitable, and better diſpoſed to every humane and friendly Office. For a profligate and abandoned Chriſtian, who ſins againſt Knowledge, and neglects all the Means of Grace that are reach'd out unto him, is the moſt odious and deteſtable Character that can be given to Man. They ſhall come from the Eaſt, and from the Weſt, from the North, and from the South, and ſhall ſit down with *Abraham*, and *Iſaac*, and *Jacob* in the Kingdom of God; but the ungrateful, diſobedient Children of the Kingdom, all nominal pretended Chriſtians, ſhall be caſt into outer Darkneſs.

Be it then your Care to live up to your Knowledge, and to improve the ſeveral Advantages you enjoy into the Means of working out your everlaſting Salvation. You have a Revelation in your Hands, which contains in it every thing that is neceſſary for you to know, to believe, and to practiſe: Mind

but its Doctrines and Precepts, and they will thoroughly furniſh you to every good Word and Work: They will ſecure you from the Snares of Error and Vice while you continue in this World, and will when you leave it, if you follow their Directions, ſafely conduct you into the Heavenly Jeruſalem, into the peaceable Society of juſt Men made perfect.

Which Directions that we may all have Grace to follow, God of his infinite Mercy grant, *&c.*



1 Cor. xiii. 12.

—— Now we ſee through a Glaſs darkly, but then Face to Face: Now I know in Part; but then ſhall I know, even as alſo I am known.

THE Imperfection of human Knowledge in this preſent State, is not more a Subject of general Complaint, than it is a Matter of univerſal Experience. Whether we employ our Faculties about ſmall or great Things, about Things preſent or abſent, material or ſpiritual, we find ourſelves very much baffled in our Enquiries, and almoſt reduced in the End to the ſame perplexing Difficulties. The *ſmall* Things evade our niceſt Reſearches; the *great* are too large for our Underſtandings to graſp. What is *preſent* we ſee but partially and ſuperficially; and what is *abſent* we only gueſs at: *Material Objects* we only know

as far as our Senſes can reach; and theſe reach no farther than the outward Properties. As to the internal Cauſes which conſtitute Things what they really are, we are entirely ignorant. And if our Knowledge in reſpect to corporeal Things is thus ſhallow and imperfect, how much more muſt it be ſo, in reſpect of thoſe that are ſpiritual? In ſhort, while our Souls are confined to theſe earthly Tabernacles, we can only have ſuch Notices as are conveyed to the Mind through the Senſes, which are the original Inlets of all our Knowledge: And as the Senſes themſelves have but imperfect Notices of Things, the Knowledge which is derived from them to the Mind, muſt of courſe be likewiſe imperfect. I would not be ſo underſtood, as if I thought this Imperfection any Way reflected either upon the Goodneſs or Wiſdom of our Creator. It is ſufficient to vindicate both theſe his Attributes, that he hath furniſhed us with the Means of attaining ſuch a Degree of Knowledge as is abundantly capable of ſerving all the Exigences of our preſent State, and alſo of anſwering the Demands of our Nature, as to our Expectations of future Happineſs. Subjects ſuited to anſwer theſe moral good Purpoſes, preſent themſelves all around us, are continually open to our Obſervation,

ſervation; and we have Faculties, which, as far as theſe Purpoſes can be anſwered, enable us to contemplate them with Advantage. But when we go farther, when we attempt to unravel all the Secrets of Nature and Providence, and to account for the Reaſons of the divine Proceedings in every particular Inſtance, our Enquiries grow preſumptuous; and inſtead of giving us any real Satisfaction, they oftentimes bring upon the Mind ſuch Doubt and Perplexity, as that it judicially becomes blind to the plaineſt Truths, though Truths of the laſt Importance. Indeed our Underſtandings at preſent are too narrow to take in Subjects ſo complicated and of ſuch vaſt Extent. We ſee but ſome broken detached Parts of the Univerſe, how then can we judge of the Wiſdom and Propriety of the whole? This Degree of Comprehenſion muſt be reſerved for a future State of Exiſtence, when our Minds, which are now ſo contracted, ſhall be enlarged; when our Souls ſhall exert their native Vigour and Activity, which they are now deprived of, by their cloſe Conjunction with theſe groſs Bodies; and when all our Faculties, now clogged and embaraſſed with Matter, ſhall ſo expand and diſengage themſelves from it, as that the moſt difficult things ſhall appear eaſy,

and all the rough Ways of Providence, which ſo many in this Life are apt to be offended at, ſhall be made plain. *For now we ſee through a Glaſs darkly, but then Face to Face: Now I know in Part; but then ſhall I know, even as alſo I am known.*

I am well aware, that theſe Expreſſions of *ſeeing through a Glaſs darkly, and of knowing in Part*, are intended by the Apoſtle to ſignify particularly our ſeeing but *darkly*, and knowing but partially, while we are in theſe Bodies, the ſpiritual Things of the other World. But as it will be found, without putting any forced Conſtruction upon them, that they are equally applicable to the Things of this, it will be no Perverſion of the Apoſtle's Senſe, if we accommodate them likewiſe to the latter Signification. For the Words themſelves are ſo far from excluding that Conſtruction relating to our Ignorance of temporal Things, that if they were not meant to expreſs, they certainly do plainly and fully imply it.

In the Proſecution therefore of my Deſign, I ſhall from theſe Words,

I. Obſerve the narrow Boundaries of human Knowledge in this preſent State; and yet what Things it may properly and uſe-

uſefully extend to, ſuggeſted to us by the Expreſſions of *ſeeing now through a Glaſs darkly, and of knowing in Part.*

II. What an Improvement will be made in our Knowledge, and what a ſurprizing Enlargement we ſhall find of our Faculties in a future State, plainly ſignified by our *ſeeing then Face to Face; and by our then knowing even as alſo we are known.* And,

Laſtly, from the Conſideration of the contracted Sphere of our Knowledge *here*, and of the enlarged, extenſive one we ſhall have *hereafter*, I ſhall conclude with making ſome practical Reflections.

I. I am to obſerve the narrow Boundaries of human Knowledge in this preſent State; and yet what Things it may properly and uſefully extend to, ſuggeſted to us by the Expreſſions *of ſeeing now through a Glaſs darkly; and of knowing in Part.*

The Meaning of theſe Expreſſions, when accurately examined and compared with our own Experience, will greatly contribute towards throwing Light upon the Matter under Enquiry.

It is firſt ſaid, that *we ſee through a Glaſs darkly:* By which we are to underſtand that all the Notices we have of Things at preſent we have through a darken'd Medium. A Glaſs, we know, when it is any way clouded or obſcured, conveys through the Eyes to the Mind but very imper-

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fect Repreſentations of Objects: The Parts appear confuſed, and the ſeveral Figures and Proportions undergo a manifeſt Alteration. And yet the Senſes themſelves may juſtly be conſidered as ſuch clouded, obſcured Glaſſes. We have, 'tis true, the Repreſentations of Things, but the groſs Medium, through which they paſs, admits but little to the Soul of their real Likeneſs. This is alſo intimated by the parallel Expreſſion in the Text, of *knowing in Part*, and is likewiſe confirmed by daily Experience. No-body needs be told how *little* he knows in Compariſon of *what* he does not know; and of that little which he thinks he knows, how much is rather the Effect of probable Conjecture than of abſolute Certainty.

But after all, to ſay *that we ſee through a Glaſs darkly*, and *know in Part*, is certainly to allow, that we have ſome Degree of Knowledge. What is therefore the Extent of our Knowledge, and to what Subjects it may *properly* and *uſefully* be applied, we are next to enquire. For that there are ſome Subjects to which our Knowledge may extend, and upon which to a certain Degree we may employ our Thoughts *uſefully*, cannot be denied, if we reflect upon the ſeveral reaſoning, intellectual Powers, of which we find ourſelves poſſeſſed.

Now ſome of the Subjects, upon which our Knowledge may be uſefully employed, are plainly theſe, The Works of the Creation; the obvious

obvious Diſpenſations of Providence, eſpecially ſuch as reſpect final Cauſes; the Nature and Conſtitution of Man, particularly that Part of him, which relates to Morals; and, laſtly, the Word of God, which contains inexhauſtible Matter for the moſt uſeful and moſt intereſting Meditations.

As for the Works of the Creation they ſeem to be peculiarly adapted to our Knowledge, as they are continually applying themſelves to all our Senſes, and likewiſe as all our Senſes are in ſome Degree fitted to receive Impreſſions from them. We cannot, without ſhutting our Eyes, and blinding our Reaſon, help obſerving, that exquiſite Wiſdom and Deſign which appears in the various Parts of the Univerſe; how Means are ſuited to Ends, and what a regular Subordination is kept up betwixt Superiors and Inferiors; and all this with a manifeſt View to promote the Well-being of the whole. This View apparently runs through both the animate and inanimate Creation, and is not leſs viſible to an attentive Obſerver in the *leaſt* of the divine Productions, than in the *greateſt*. In ſhort, there appears, upon the leaſt Obſervation, to be a conſtant Circulation, as it were, of good Offices betwixt the ſeveral Parts of the Creation, by which

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the Happineſs of Particulars, and alſo of the whole in mutual Conjunction with each other, is wonderfully provided for.

And as Man, if he will only make a proper Uſe of his Faculties, is qualifyed for thus contemplating the Works of the Creation; ſo will he find from ſuch Contemplations new Motives of Gratitude towards his Maker continually preſenting themſelves, the natural Effect of which is Obedience to his Will; and alſo be furniſhed with Inducements to exerciſe a more warm, extenſive Benevolence towards his Fellow-creatures. To ſee ſuch a Profuſion of Bleſſings as is ſpread over the Face of the whole Earth for our Comfort and Convenience, cannot but prompt us to look up with Thankfulneſs to the bountiful Author of them; and to ſee at the ſame Time ſo many Sharers of the ſame Bleſſings with us from the ſame liberal Hand, cannot but excite us, if we have the leaſt Spark of Generoſity remaining in us, to imitate, as far as our Abilities will permit, ſo bright an Example of doing good, by acting in Subſerviency to, and concurring with the Deſigns of ſo gracious a Providence. Indeed, the whole Volume of Nature contains ſo many fair and legible Characters of Wiſdom and Goodneſs in it, *as he that run-*

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neth may read them; and he that readeth with Care and Attention, cannot but be bettered by them.

What next is a proper Subject for our uſeful Enquiries, are the obvious Diſpenſations of Providence. From the ordinary Courſe of Things we may ſee enough to convince us, that Virtue is the Object of God's Love and Approbation, and Vice the Object of his Hatred and Diſlike. This appears in a Variety of Inſtances, where we obſerve what may be called natural Rewards conſequent upon the one, and natural Puniſhments conſequent upon the other. I call them both natural, becauſe they ſeem to be the original Appointment of the Author of Nature in the firſt Formation and Conſtitution of Things. And though there may be ſome Exceptions to this general providential Method of acting, and the Reverſe may ſometimes happen; yet theſe Exceptions are no reaſonable Foundation for Encouragement to the Wicked, or of Diſcouragement to the Righteous. They ſhou'd rather be a Proof to them both, that ſince Juſtice does not always take Place here, there will certainly be a State of impartial Retribution hereafter, where every Man ſhall be dealt with according to his Works. At leaſt the many apparent Advantages attending

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Virtue, and the many Inconveniences attending Vice, are a plain and undeniable Argument that the general Intention of Providence certainly is, that Virtue ſhould finally be rewarded, and Vice puniſhed. And all Exceptions to the contrary may be looked upon in this Life only, as ſo many accidental Interruptions to this general Intention, which we know, as ſure as God is a Rewarder of Verture and a Puniſher of Vice, will fully be accompliſhed in a Life to come. The Inſtruction therefore that this obvious Providential Method of acting will ſuggeſt to us, is, that the vertuous and deſerving, however they may ſuffer for a Time, will aſſuredly be rewarded and made happy either ſooner or later; and that the vitious and abandoned, though at preſent they may eſcape with Impunity, will not always eſcape ſo. And from hence we may likewiſe learn not to think hardly of Providence, becauſe we ſee it ſometimes fares ill with the Righteous, and well with the Wicked: For theſe ſeeming Inequalities will certainly be rectified in a future State; when it ſhall be made appear, to the everlaſting Joy of the former, and everlaſting Confuſion of the latter, that the Judge of all the Earth invariably does what is right.

Another Subject for our Knowledge to be employed

employed upon, which is certainly proper, and may likewiſe be of Uſe to us is, the Nature and Conſtitution of Man, as far as relates to Morals. It was the Obſervation of a late deſervedly eminent Poet and Philoſopher, that *the proper Study of Mankind is Man.* He meant, that the Knowledge and Study of ourſelves, as far as they were made ſubſervient to the Improvement and Regulation of our Moral Conduct, were the moſt intereſting Subjects we could poſſibly be engaged about.

And indeed ſince our Happineſs in a great Meaſure here, but entirely hereafter, depends upon our moral Conduct, it undoubtedly concerns us ſo to examine and conſider the ſeveral Springs and Movements of our Nature, as that we may be able to direct and regulate our moral Conduct aright. Now it is obvious to every one, who reflects upon his own inward Make and Conſtitution, that he is compounded of two Parts, a Soul and a Body; and that to each of theſe Parts there belong certain Powers and Faculties. The proper Buſineſs therefore of Man, as a moral and free Agent, is to maintain a conſtant Harmony and Agreement amongſt theſe reſpective Powers, to take Care that the Inferior do not by any lawleſs Means gain an Aſcendency over the Superior, but that all of them

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mutually conſpire ſo to act in friendly Concert with each other, as that the Well-being of the whole Man be ſecured. Thus by ſtudying the ſeveral Powers of our Nature, how far our Reaſon is the governing Principle within us, and where and in what Reſpects, the Paſſions are apt to uſurp a Superiority over it; we ſhall be upon our Guard to check the firſt Tendencies towards any inward Diſorder; we ſhall know where our Weakneſs lies, and by that Means be prepared, when an Attack is made upon us, for making a proper Reſiſtance.

And laſtly, the Word of God, or the Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament, contain inexhauſtible Matter of moſt uſeful, and moſt intereſting Enquiry. They contain a Hiſtory of Providence reſpecting Man, which begins at the Creation of the World, and only ends at the final Conſummation of all Things. This Hiſtory informs us what we were at firſt when we came out of our Maker's Hands, and what we made ourſelves afterwards by our wilful Obſtinacy and Perverſeneſs. It informs us, that we were at firſt made perfect and happy, without any of thoſe jarring, diſcordant Principles in our Nature, which now create us ſo much Uneaſineſs; but that afterwards by an Abuſe of our Free-

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will in tranſgreſſing the Divine Command, we forfeited that Happineſs and Perfection, and inſtead of the Life and Immortality which was promiſed us on Condition that we kept our Innocence, became ſubject by our Diſobedience to Miſery and Death. It further informs us, that ſuch was the Goodneſs of God towards us, after we had thus rendered ourſelves ſubject to Miſery and Death, as to contrive a Way for our Redemption. This was intimated to *Adam* immediately upon the Fall by the Promiſe made him, that *the Seed of the Woman ſhould bruiſe the Serpent's Head*, and was conveyed down to his Deſcendants by Types and Predictions, pointing out to them that in ſome future Periods of Time the Types wou'd be realized, and the Predictions accompliſhed. And what the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament only obſcurely hinted at concerning this Redemption, is clearly and fully diſcovered to us in the Scriptures of the New, in which we find, that what we loſt in *Adam*, either is, or will be reſtored to us in Chriſt. And indeed there are certain Paſſages in theſe Scriptures which ſeem to import, that the Redemption wrought for us by Chriſt, is a Redemption of ſuch a Nature and Extent, as that it will recover to us all thoſe Privileges which we had loſt by the Fall,

and that all the Sons of the firſt *Adam*, who were involved in his Guilt, ſhall finally become Partakers of all the Benefits derived from the Redemption of the ſecond *Adam*. No doubt but thoſe Parts of the New Teſtament which relate to the future States of the Church are in general dark and obſcure; yet I think they are ſufficiently clear to convince ſpeculative Minds, that the bad Conſequences of the Fall, which we now feel and lament, are not yet removed in that full Extent and Degree which the Word *Redemption* ſeems to imply; but that there will be in ſome future Age, when the Kingdoms of this World ſhall become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Chriſt, a more general and perfect Releaſe from the Bondage of Sin; and the Prophetick Deſcription of a new Heaven, and a new Earth, wherein dwelleth Righteouſneſs, ſhall be better anſwered.

However all may ſee who read and ſtudy the Scriptures, that the Scheme of Providence relating to Man, commencing at his Creation, and not ending till the End of all Things, is a Scheme throughout of the greateſt Mercy and Benevolence, is but one continued Effort of Divine Goodneſs towards ſaving and making happy rebellious Creatures, who by their own Folly and Wickedneſs had ſubjected

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themſelves to Miſery. And ſurely a Senſe of God's great Goodneſs diſplay'd in ſo many Inſtances, and in ſuch a conſtant Succeſſion of moſt gracious Diſpenſations towards us; and a Senſe at the ſame Time of our own Diſobedience and Ingratitude under them all; cannot fail, if duly reflected on, to ſoften our rebellious and ſtubborn Diſpoſitions to his Divine Will, to reduce our depraved Appetites and Paſſions to the ſober Direction of Reaſon and Religion, and to make us exert our utmoſt Endeavours in concurring with that generous Deſign every where conſpicuous in his ſacred Word, of forwarding us in the Way that leadeth to everlaſting Life.

Having thus ſhewn the narrow Boundaries of human Knowledge in this preſent State, but yet what Things it may properly and uſefully extend to; I proceed to obſerve, briefly,

II. What an Improvement will be made in our Knowledge, and what a ſurprizing Enlargement we ſhall find of our Faculties in a future State. For *now we ſee only through a Glaſs, darkly; but then Face to Face. Now I know only in Part; but then ſhall I know, even as alſo I am known.* All will be then clear and immediate Viſion, and there will be none of that dim Medium be-

tween, which now intercepts our Proſpect of Things, and renders all our Knowledge dark and imperfect.

What are the Ways by which the Soul hereafter will apprehend Things ſo clearly and diſtinctly, we cannot at preſent tell. Moſt probable it is, that when the Soul has once eſcaped from the Impriſonment of the Body, it will find itſelf endued with a new Set of Faculties, or at leaſt with ſuch Faculties as have hitherto lain dormant, which will qualify it for contemplating that new Scene of Objects, which ſhall then preſent themſelves. At leaſt we know, that the Soul at preſent is very much clog'd in its Operations by its cloſe Conjunction with Matter, and that it has certain active Powers, which are now in a great Meaſure rendered uſeleſs by means of that Conjunction: For we find in Dreams when it has Liberty to act, and it is, as it were, independent of the Body, how quick and vigorous its Operations are, and what a Readineſs of perceiving, judging, and inventing, we enjoy then in our ſleeping Hours, which we never experienced in our waking ones. Indeed ſuch a heavy Load of Matter as the Soul is united with, muſt needs throw a Numbneſs and Inactivity over all its Faculties, and cramp, as

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it were, that native Energy of acting with which it is originally endued.

But theſe Impediments which lye now in the Way of our Knowledge, will entirely be removed in a future State. The Soul, when diſengaged from this Load of corruptible Matter, will not want the Miniſtry of the Senſes to furniſh it with Materials for employing its Faculties upon: It will then ſee by its own intellectual Light, and not be beholden to any outward Aſſiſtance. It will then have a quicker and more expedite Way of apprehending; and this Apprehenſion, as it is entirely ſpiritual, will be clear and diſtinct, not attended with any of that Confuſion and Perplexity, which moſt of our Perceptions at preſent are embarraſſed with. We ſhall then know, even as alſo we are known: And though I do not queſtion but that our Faculties are ſuited to our preſent State, and that they are capable of furniſhing us with as much Knowledge as we have occaſion for; yet certain it is, that when we paſs into a more perfect State of Exiſtence, and have got rid of thoſe Incumbrances which cloſely adhere to the Condition of Humanity, there will open to us a clearer and leſs confuſed Scene of Things, and all thoſe Obſcurities

which ſo much perplex'd us in this Life, ſhall be clear'd up to our entire Satisfaction.

From the Conſideration therefore of the contracted Sphere of our Knowledge here; and of the enlarged extenſive one we ſhall have hereafter, I ſhall conclude with making ſome practical Reflections. And,

1*ſt*, Since human Knowledge has its Bounds, beyond which if we once paſs, we are loſt and bewildered in the Darkneſs of Error; let us be cautious to confine our Enquiries to ſuch Subjects as are ſuited to our Capacities, and not be ambitious of puſhing them further than our Underſtandings can fairly carry us. To ſee ſhort-ſighted Man, who is puzzled with the moſt common Appearances in the World, preſuming to explain the Nature of God, the Reaſons of his Conduct, and even to preſcribe in ſome Caſes Rules for him to act by, muſt give ſuperior Beings, ſuppoſing them Eye Witneſſes of ſuch a Behaviour, a diſagreeable Proſpect at once both of his Pride and Weakneſs. Indeed for a finite Creature thus to canvaſs the Nature, and direct the Proceedings of an infinite Creator, is certainly the higheſt Pitch of Arrogance and Preſumption. One wou'd think it wou'd be ſufficient to check all ſuch vain and aſ-

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piring Attempts in him, when he finds that he is baffled by the moſt contemptible Things around him; that there is not a Shrub, a Plant, or a Reptile, the Nature and Properties of which he can fully comprehend: And will he then think of comprehending the Nature, or accounting for the Ways of a Being who inhabits Eternity, who fills and pervades all Things, and who is intimately preſent with all his Works? The Experience of our own Ignorance in ordinary Caſes, ought ever to reſtrain us from meddling with Matters that are confeſſedly too high for us, and make us to ſubmit where we cannot underſtand. However, we are to remember,

2*dly*, That though Man's Knowledge is at preſent ſhallow, it is nevertheleſs ſufficient, if we uſe all the Helps that are afforded us, for conducting us in the Way that leadeth to Happineſs. The Means for attaining this deſirable End, Reaſon aſſiſted by Divine Revelation points out ſo fully and clearly, that none among Us at leaſt, who enjoy the invaluable Bleſſing of the Goſpel, can poſſibly be miſtaken about them. And ſurely to know how we may be made happy, is the moſt intereſting Piece of Knowledge we *can* be poſſeſs'd of, and which is enough to compenſate the Want of all other Knowledge. For

what wou'd it avail us to have the *Gift of Prophecy*, and to *underſtand all Myſteries and all Knowledge*, if we were ignorant of the Means whereby to ſecure our moſt laſting Intereſt. So that, ſince we are acquainted with that Part of Knowledge which is able to make us *wiſe unto Salvation*, we may be very eaſy and ſatisfied as to all the reſt: Let us but remember, that if we *know theſe Things*, *we are only happy if we do them.*

Laſtly; as the Sphere of our Knowledge will be very much enlarged in a future State; let us refer all Difficulties which we cannot ar preſent comprehend to that State. For thoſe Difficulties with which we ſo often diſquiet ourſelves here in vain, relate rather to Matters of more Curioſity than to Things of real Uſe; and therefore our Ignorance of them might very well be diſpens'd with. And as to theſe Truths which are revealed to us in the Goſpel, ſuch as the Incarnation of our Saviour, the Doctrine of the Trinity, and the like, the Nature and Manner of which we cannot explain, we ought to believe them upon the Word and Authority of God, whoſe Authority will ever be a ſufficient Reaſon for our Belief. In a Word, what Doctrines are difficult and myſterious, we are only ſo far concerned in as they are revealed to us:

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As to our coming to a perfect Knowledge of them, that muſt be reſerved for another World. But what are plain and eaſy are of the greateſt Importance; and if we ſuffer them to have a due Influence upon our Lives, we ſhall, when we dye, be tranſlated into a State, where we ſhall be put into the real Enjoyment of ſuch good Things, *as Eye has not ſeen, nor Ear heard, neither has it ever yet enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive.*

SERMON III.

1 Tim. i. 19.

Holding Faith and a good Conſcience, which ſome having put away, concerning Faith have made Shipwrack.

IT ſeems by the Caution, which the Apoſtle here gives to *Timothy*, that a good Conſcience has all along been conſidered as the neceſſary Foundation of a true Faith, and that where ſuch a Conſcience is wanting, there Infidelity will eaſily get Footing. The Reaſon is plain and obvious. While Men conform their Lives to the Doctrines of the Goſpel, they can have no poſſible Inducement to diſbelieve it. Every Thing then conſpires to ſtrengthen their Faith, and to make them acquieſce in the Certainty of it. But when they grow diſſolute in their Morals, and take greater Liberties than the Goſpel will allow them, they have then no other Way to ſcreen themſelves from the Puniſhment that it threatens againſt ſuch Diſſoluteneſs, but by diſputing its Authority and weakening its Credibility. For then

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it becomes their Intereſt to wiſh that it was not true: And what it is their Intereſt to wiſh, will eaſily grow into a ſettled Perſwaſion. Thus every the leaſt wilful Departure from a conſcientious Diſcharge of our Duty, is a gradual Approach to Infidelity; and we ſhall not be long in commencing Unbelievers, in making *Shipwrack of our Faith*, when once we have *put away from us a good Conſcience*.

In order therefore to ſecure us in the Faith of Chriſt, I ſhall,

I. Shew, that a truly Religious Man, or one, who in the Language of the Text *holdeth a good Conſcience*, will ever continue ſtedfaſt in this Faith.

II. That none will deſert it or make Shipwrack of it, but ſuch as have liv'd in direct oppoſition to its Doctrines and Precepts. And,

III. I ſhall repreſent to you how much wiſer thoſe are, who *hold Faith and a good Conſcience* in Reſpect of both Happineſs here and hereafter; than thoſe who have parted with both, who are become Infidels in Principle, and Libertines in Practice.

I. I am to ſhew, that a truly Religious Man, or one, who in the Language of the Text *holdeth a good Conſcience*, will always con-

continue ſtedfaſt in the Faith of Chriſt. For we ſhall find upon Examination, that the Goſpel which contains all the Articles of the Chriſtian Faith, requires nothing from ſuch an one but what is agreeable to his Inclinations, nothing but what he is willing to practiſe, and diſpoſed to believe, upon the Evidence and Authority with which it comes ſupported.

If we conſider it in Reſpect to Practice, we ſhall find the whole Purport and Deſign of it is, to recommend by the moſt intereſting Motives and Conſiderations, ſuch a Love of the Deity and of our Fellow-Creatures, as every good Man wou'd chooſe to be poſſeſs'd of. It further teaches us, that by denying all Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, we ſhou'd live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World: And who that wou'd live ſoberly, that wou'd obſerve Moderation in his Enjoyments and Purſuits, who that wou'd act with Juſtice in his Dealings with others, or who that wou'd ſerve and obey his Maker with Reverence and godly Fear, can ever be prevailed upon to reject that Religion which contains and inculcates this Doctrine? For theſe are the very Duties, which he deſires above all Things to perform, which he finds to be moſt conducive both to his preſent

ſent and future Happineſs, and by the Obſervance of which he principally diſtinguiſhes himſelf to be a rational, intelligent Being. So that he can have no Intereſt to wiſh that the Religion which enjoins theſe Duties was not true; nay, his Intereſt plainly lies on the other ſide. Nor can he have any Biaſs upon his Mind to draw him from the Path it marks out for him; ſince to one thus diſpoſed its *Ways muſt be Ways of Pleaſantneſs, and all its Paths, Peace.*

And with Regard to thoſe Articles of Faith, which Chriſtianity propoſes, they are all ſo comfortable and encouraging, ſo ſuited to ſupply the Wants of our Nature, and to bring us to God the original Source of all Happineſs, that every good Man, who deſires to obey the Divine Will, and to perform an acceptable Service to his Maker, will always moſt thankfully embrace that Religion which contains them. For in the whole Oeconomy of Man's Redemption delivered in the Scriptures, wherein are included all the particular Doctrines of our Faith, there are ſuch glorious Diſplays of Divine Goodneſs, ſuch gracious Efforts towards ſaving and making happy ſinful, diſobedient Creatures, that none who have any Regard for their own Welfare, or wou'd have all

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Impediments removed that might any Way oppoſe it, will ever endeavour to weaken the Authority of thoſe ſacred Writings, or upon any Account to bring their Veracity in Queſtion. The Defects of our Religious Services are *there* abundantly ſupplied from the all-ſufficient Merits of Chriſt, and we are through him called to a State of Salvation, when we ſhould have deſpaired of ourſelves of eſcaping the Puniſhment naturally due to our manifold Tranſgreſſions. God, we are there inform'd, is pleaſed to accept, what our Saviour *did* and *ſuffer'd* in our Stead, as a full Satisfaction and Attonement for our Sins, and provided we only endeavour to forſake theſe, he will, in Conſideration of that Satisfaction and Attonement, admit us into Terms of Mercy and Forgiveneſs. And leſt we ſhou'd be diſcouraged as to the Performance of theſe Conditions which are required of us in the Goſpel, and which are the indiſpenſable Conditions of our Acceptance and Salvation; the Aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit is graciouſly promis'd us, which will enable us, in Concurrence with our own ſincere Endeavours, to ſurmount all Difficulties that may oppoſe or embarraſs us in the Path of our Duty, and make us more than Conquerors over our three moſt inveterate

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Enemies, the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil.

Nay, as a further Motive to our Perſeverance in Goodneſs, a future State is clearly laid open to our View, where the exceeding great Reward of eternal Life and Happineſs is offer'd to all, who by patient Continuance in Well-doing ſeek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality. In a Word, all the Articles of our Faith, even the moſt myſterious of them, furniſh ſuch powerful, ſuch encouraging Inducements to Obedience and an Holy Life, as that the Mind is freed from thoſe perplexing Difficulties which before attended the Performance of our Duty; and notwithſtanding the Imperfections of our Religious Services, we are put in a Capacity of working out our eternal Salvation, and of obtaining an Inheritance among them who are *ſanctified through Faith in Chriſt Jeſus.* And ſurely a good Man, who is conſcious of his many Defects, who is conſcious of his many wilful Deviations from the Laws of his Maker, and who knows that ſuch Deviations will unavoidably expoſe him to Puniſhment, cannot but gladly lay hold of, and cordially embrace, a Religion, which thus affords a Supply for all his Defects, which provides a Satisfaction and

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Attonement for his Sins, and which, if he is not wanting to himſelf, will not only ſcreen him from the Puniſhment due to them, but will alſo procure him a Share in the Happineſs of Heaven. I ſhall therefore, as I propoſed, proceed to ſhew,

2*dly*, That none will deſert this Religion or Faith, and make Shipwrack of it, but ſuch as have lived in direct Oppoſition to its Doctrines and Precepts. Indeed, one would almoſt imagine, that the very worſt of Men, would ſome Time or other be glad to have the Chriſtian Religion by way of Refuge to fly to; becauſe they can never be ſo wicked and abandoned, but that upon their Repentance and Amendment, it will always offer to them Pardon and Grace: And it is natural to ſuppoſe, that if ſuch have a Mind to be ſaved, they would readily catch at any Means propoſed to them, which might put Salvation in their Power. But the Misfortune is, that they have contracted, by long Indulgence, ſuch Habits of Vice and Impiety, as that they cannot bear the Thoughts of betaking themſelves to a virtuous Courſe of living. They are in love with their Sins, and therefore are determin'd not to part with them. Hence it is, that they will not believe that Religion, in which the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven againſt all Ungodlineſs

and Unrighteouſneſs of Men; becauſe to believe ſuch a Religion as this is, and yet to live in direct Contradiction to it, wou'd be a continual Source of Pain and Uneaſineſs to them. They therefore furniſh themſelves with as many Arguments as they are able againſt Chriſtianity: For if they cou'd once weaken its Credibility, and deſtroy its Authority, there wou'd be nothing that cou'd give a Check to their immoral Behaviour. And this is the only true Reaſon that can be aſſigned, why ſo many are ſuch violent Enemies to the Goſpel of Chriſt, and take ſo much Pains to bring it into Diſcredit. They wou'd willingly have all Reſtraints removed with regard to their Actions, to their unlawful Practices; and yet they know very well that this cannot be done, ſo long as the Divine Authority of the Goſpel-Revelation ſtands firm and unſhaken; for ſo long, they are aſſured, their Obligations to Virtue will continue in force. It has therefore been the Endeavour of Libertines and Free-thinkers to undermine the very Foundations of Chriſtianity; to weaken the Evidence by which it is ſupported, and to attack ſuch Parts of it as ſeem moſt exceptionable, in order to invalidate the Authority of the whole. 'Tis true, the Morality of the Goſpel is ſo pure and perfect in all Reſpects, as that few

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of its keeneſt Adverſaries have openly dared to object againſt it. But then, to releaſe themſelves from the Obligations of it, they have levelled their whole Artillery againſt the myſterious Doctrines of our Faith, being well aware that if theſe were once beat down, the Morality of the Goſpel muſt fall together with them; inaſmuch as they both ſtand upon the ſame Foundation and are ſupported by the ſame Authority. They are well aware, that if they cou'd make it appear that ſome of the Articles of our Religion are abſurd and incredible, this wou'd prove an inſuperable Objection againſt the Morality of its Doctrines and Precepts; becauſe as they proceed both from the ſame Author, the Abſurdity and Incredibility of the former wou'd very much weaken, if not entirely deſtroy, the Authority of the latter.

And thus it is, that while the Enemies of Chriſtianity pretend great Regard to the Goſpel-Morality, they are by a covert Way endeavouring to undermine it, and to take away the Foundation upon which it ſtands. But, unluckily for them, they have pitch'd upon a Method, which will by no means anſwer their Purpoſe. For as to the Articles of our Faith, that they are either abſurd or incredible, is more than ever yet the ſtouteſt Champions for

Infidelity have been able to prove. To prove that they are abſurd they muſt have adequate Ideas of the Subject-Matter of them, muſt perceive a manifeſt Incongruity in them, and this Incongruity muſt appear from their being flatly contradictory to ſome other known Truths, of which they have the cleareſt and moſt perfect Conceptions. Yet, I believe, no one will pretend to ſay, that the Nature of God, his Manner of Exiſtence, and the Methods of his Diſpenſations, which are the Subject-Matter of our Faith, are Truths ſo clearly apprehended, as that we have full and perfect Conceptions of them; or that we have ſuch a diſtinct Knowledge concerning them, as that by comparing them with Truths fully known, we plainly ſee an Incongruity and Abſurdity in them. So that the moſt that can be ſaid of them is, That they are unintelligible; and if the Unintelligibleneſs of Things proves their Abſurdity, then moſt Things in the World may be ſaid to be abſurd, becauſe there are few Things in it that we thoroughly underſtand.

And that the Doctrines of Faith are incredible, is urg'd with as little Reaſon. Men do not, in hiſtorical Matters, immediately pronounce Things or Facts incredible, merely becauſe they are contrary to all their own former

former Experience and Obſervation. This wou'd in Time introduce univerſal Scepticiſm and Doubting. It is enough to ſatisfy them of the Truth of thoſe Things or Facts, that they are atteſted by Perſons of Credit and Veracity, and who may reaſonably be ſuppoſed to be competent Judges of them, and thoroughly to underſtand what they relate concerning them. For Men's not being acquainted with ſuch Things themſelves, provided the Veracity and Abilities of the Relators are unqueſtionable, is no ſort of Hindrance to their believing them. And if we receive the Witneſs of Men with regard to Matters of Fact, which we ourſelves cannot account for; ſurely the Witneſs of God is greater and more to be relied on, with regard to thoſe Articles of Faith, which, though we do not comprehend them, are nevertheleſs ſupported and confirmed by Divine Authority. For we muſt not, we dare not, call thoſe Things incredible, however myſterious, which God, who cannot lie, has atteſted to be true by the moſt undeniable Evidence, the Evidence of Miracles.

Beſides, thoſe very Articles of Faith, which Infidels would repreſent as abſurd or incredible, are all of ſuch a Nature and Tendency, as to be manifeſtly ſubſervient to the Intereſt

of Morality, and are admirably calculated for promoting the Practice of it in the World. There is not, I will venture to ſay, one ſingle Article of our Belief, which, if duly reflected upon, does not raiſe in our Breaſts ſome virtuous Diſpoſitions, which does not enflame us with Love and Affection towards our Maker, attended with a hearty Deſire of obeying his Will, and inſpire us with Charity and Benevolence towards our Fellow-Creatures. And if every ſingle Article has this virtuous Tendency, when conſidered ſeparately; ſurely all of them when taken together muſt have the greateſt practical Influence upon the Lives of Mankind. Thoſe Perſons therefore can never be Well-wiſhers to Morality, whatever they may pretend, who labour to depreciate the Articles of our Faith; becauſe theſe very Articles, if believed in, would furniſh them with the greateſt Encouragements, and moſt powerful Motives to the Practice of moral Duties.

The plain Truth is, that the Doctrines and Precepts of the Goſpel contradict their Lives, and lay a diſagreeable Reſtraint upon their Actions; and therefore they are willing to find ſome Expedient that may remove this Reſtraint and ſet them more at liberty. And as the myſterious Articles of our Faith ſeem

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to lye moſt open to Cavil and Exception, they employ the whole Strength of their Sophiſtry againſt them; well knowing, that if the Truth of theſe Articles was once render'd doubtful by an artful and diſingenuous Repreſentation, the moral Parts of Chriſtianity would ſuffer along with them, and loſe much of their Credit. By which means the Obligations of Morality would be very much weakened, as theſe are principally derived from the undiminiſh'd Authority of the Goſpel, and Men would take Occaſion from thence to indulge themſelves in a greater Liberty of acting. Thus much I am however confident of, that if Men wou'd but make the Experiment, and forſake their Sins, wou'd they but keep their Paſſions within the Bounds of Reaſon and Religion, the Difficulties which attend the Belief of the Chriſtian Doctrines would every Day leſſen, they would more and more ſee the Reaſonableneſs and Excellency of them; and that Darkneſs at laſt being diſperſed, which their Vices before clouded their Minds with, they wou'd clearly perceive and readily acknowledge, that the Goſpel-Revelation, which contains theſe Doctrines, is the Power of God unto Salvation, and that there is no other Name under Heaven whereby they can be ſaved, but only the Name of

our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. And this leads me to ſhew,

3*dly*, How much wiſer thoſe are, who *hold Faith and a good Conſcience* in reſpect of both Happineſs here and hereafter, than thoſe who have parted with *both*, who are become Infidels in Principle, and Libertines in Practice. Now it has always been eſteemed a Mark of Wiſdom to chooſe and embrace ſuch Things as are upon the whole, though perhaps attended with ſome particular Inconveniencies, beſt calculated for promoting our Happineſs; and, on the contrary, to reject ſuch Things, as though they may be productive of ſome particular Pleaſures and Advantages, are nevertheleſs upon the whole productive of Miſery. Let us then try whether the Chriſtian or Infidel acts the wiſer Part, the one in believing, the other in diſbelieving the Goſpel-Revelation, according to this Teſt.

The Chriſtian purſues a Scheme of Life, which the leaſt that can be ſaid in Favour of it is, that at all Events, it is free from the Danger of miſcarrying in the laſt Reſult of Things, and is clear of all thoſe Difficulties and Perplexities, which the contrary Scheme muſt neceſſarily be clog'd with. If we view him in reſpect of preſent Eaſe and Satisfaction, he has all the Ingredients for it in his

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Hands that he can poſſibly deſire. The Virtues, which he practiſes, and which the Goſpel enjoins him, not only gain him the Eſteem, and Confidence, and Good-will of Men, by which he lives comfortably and happily with all about him, but likewiſe fill his Mind with that Heart-felt Joy, with that calm Sun-ſhine of the Soul, which will ſupport and bear him up with Courage and Decency in Seaſons of the moſt trying and complicated Diſtreſs. And though he is conſcious of the many Alloys and Imperfections of his beſt Actions, and how unable he is of himſelf to procure the Divine Favour; yet a Senſe of being reconciled to God by the Death of his Son, of having his Sins pardoned through Chriſt's all-ſufficient Merits, takes away the Sting of Guilt, diſpels that Gloom with which it before overcaſt his Mind, and brings him to a State of Serenity and Peace, as to his Reconciliation and Acceptance with his Maker. And when he looks beyond the Grave into Futurity, a Proſpect truly glorious and delightful opens to his View. Heaven and eternal Happineſs preſent themſelves to him as the ſure Reward of his patient Continuance in Well-doing, and which, when he leaves this World, he is aſſured his Saviour and Judge will put him

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in Poſſeſſion of, with a *Well done good and faithful Servant, enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.*

But the Reverſe of all this, in Reſpect to Happineſs, is the Caſe of the Libertine-Infidel. In reſpect of his preſent Satisfaction, his Virtues, we may preſume, can go but a very little Way in contributing towards it. For it is but too often the ſhameful Diſtinction of this ſort of Men, to deny themſelves no Gratifications, however unlawful, which their depraved Inclinations ſhall at any time ſuggeſt to them. And as to theſe Gratifications, many of the Libertine-Sect themſelves, after repeated Experience, have declared at laſt, that there is more of Bitter than of Sweet in them, and that the Pains which ſucceed them, do infinitely more than counterballance the Pleaſure attending them.

The Infidel then excludes himſelf from having a Share in that Satisfaction which ariſes from a Conſciouſneſs of a virtuous, well-ſpent Life, by his vitious Indulgences. Nor is this all. The Conſideration of the Juſtice of God, and of his having provoked that Juſtice by many wilful and daring Violations of his ſacred Laws, muſt, whenever he reflects, give him Trouble and Uneaſineſs. For he knows that every Violation of thoſe Laws will ſubject

ject him to Puniſhment, and that this Puniſhment will as certainly be inflicted upon him in Proportion to his Guilt, as that God is a juſt and holy Being. The Chriſtian indeed is freed from this Uneaſineſs, as he has an Attonement provided, which upon his Repentance will cancel the Guilt of his Tranſgreſſions, and ſcreen him from the Puniſhment they wou'd otherwiſe have expoſed him to. But the Infidel, as he diſclaims that Mercy propoſed to him in the Goſpel, and will not own Chriſt for his Saviour and Redeemer, and yet knows of no other Way whereby the Divine Juſtice can be ſatisfied, and his Sins pardoned, muſt neceſſarily have uneaſy, deſponding Thoughts, and be much at a Loſs as to the Efficacy of his Repentance in order to Salvation.

And to one, who by his own Obſtinacy in Unbelief has ſuch a Load of Guilt unattoned for, and of Sin unremitted, lying heavy upon him, the Proſpect of a future State, where both are to be puniſh'd, cannot but be dreadful and alarming to him, as it will make him anticipate that Miſery denounced in the Scriptures againſt thoſe ungodly Men, who believe not the Goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. For, as he will not accept of that Atonement for his Sins, which

God

God has graciouſly provided for him, and yet knows that without ſome Atonement the Divine Juſtice requires he ſhould be puniſh'd for them, he muſt unavoidably exclude himſelf from a Poſſibility of enjoying Happineſs in a future State, and conſequently muſt unavoidably ſubject himſelf to Miſery.

From this ſhort Repreſentation therefore of the Chriſtian and Infidel, may eaſily be ſeen which of them upon the whole takes the wiſer Courſe in reſpect of Happineſs. What chiefly ſhews the Wiſdom of the Chriſtian is, that he runs no Hazard let Things go as they will. If his Religion proves true, he is made happy for ever; and if it proves falſe, he is in no worſe, but in a much better Condition, than if he had not believed it. For the Virtues it puts him upon practiſing, at leaſt bid fairer for ſecuring his temporal Intereſt, than the Vices which the Libertine-Scheme would indulge him in. And as to Futurity, upon Suppoſition that the Principles of natural Religion are true, namely, that there is a God, that this God is a juſt, and holy, and good Being, and conſequently that he will reward the ſincerely righteous, and puniſh the obſtinately Wicked; upon this Suppoſition, I ſay, he will certainly by his Chriſtian Virtues, by his living ſoberly, righteouſly,

teouſly, and godly in this preſent World, ſooner recommend himſelf, than if he had been without them, to the Favour of a juſt and merciful Being in the World to come.

Even ſuppoſing there was no future State at all, and that Religion was nothing but an Impoſture; yet ſtill he would enjoy a pleaſing Deluſion, while he lived, attended with ſome real Advantages; and would, when he died, have none to ridicule him upon his Diſappointment, upon his erroneous Perſuaſion.

Whereas, the Infidel, on the other Hand, takes at beſt a very hazardous and dangerous Courſe. If the Chriſtian Religion proves falſe according to his Wiſhes, he gains nothing, but rather loſes, by having his Wiſhes anſwered. Not being under any of thoſe Reſtraints which Chriſtianity lays upon all who believe in its Doctrines, he runs into ſuch immoral Practices, as he knows he muſt be puniſh'd for upon the Principles of natural Religion, *i. e.* in caſe he allows God to be a juſt and righteous Being. Nay, if his Infidelity has carried him ſo far as to diſbelieve a future State, the Influence which ſuch a Diſbelief will have upon his Actions, will by no means promote even his temporal Intereſt. For the Perſuaſion that he ſhould never be

call'd

call'd to an Account hereafter for his Behaviour here, will tempt him to indulge himſelf in ſuch vitious Gratifications, as will, in the natural Courſe of Things, bring upon him many Evils and Diſorders, and ſhortly put a Period to that Life, in which he believes all his Expectations ſhall end in an utter Extinction of Being.

But then, if the Chriſtian Religion proves true, and he never can be able to prove the contrary, there remains nothing for him but a *certain fearful Looking-for of Judgment and fiery Indignation.* He riſques his all upon a bare Suppoſition that Chriſtianity is falſe; and if he happens to be miſtaken, he is miſerable for ever. Now in all doubtful Caſes, (and ſurely the Falſity of Chriſtianity is one) a wiſe Man will certainly take that ſide of the Queſtion, where, though he may poſſibly be in an Error, yet he is out of all Danger of finally miſcarrying. And in this the Wiſdom of the Believer conſiſts, that though Chriſtianity ſhould prove falſe, yet he runs no Hazard in believing it. Whereas, it is the Folly of the Infidel, to reject that Side of the Queſtion, wherein there is no Danger at all, and to chooſe that Side which is doubtful, and which, if he ſhould be miſtaken about, is attended with the greateſt Danger,

the

the Danger of eternal Misery. And therefore,

To conclude, If we wou'd be safe at all Events, and act upon the same Principles of Prudence as we generally do in respect of our temporal Concernments, *let us hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering*. We can never be Losers by being honest, sincere Christians. If our Religion should prove false, we are upon as good a Footing, in Point of present Advantage, as those who reject it; and if it proves true, we are infallibly secure of Happiness to all Eternity. So that even supposing the Truth of our Religion was doubtful, we must at least own the Belief of it gives us a noble and glorious Chance, such a Chance as every wise Man wou'd choose to be an Adventurer for. But then, if we are as certain of its Truth as we are certain that God cannot lye, and have as much Evidence of its coming from him as the Nature of Things will admit of, all the Motives that can be drawn either from a Prospect of present or future Happiness, which it clearly contains, will mutually conspire to strengthen our Belief in it; and nothing but the greatest Folly and Wickedness can induce Men to the Disbelief of it. To close all, I shall apply these Words of our Saviour,

with

with a little Variation, which will characterize, by a beautiful Contraſt, the Wiſdom of thoſe who embrace, and the Folly of ſuch as reject the Goſpel Revelation. *Whoſoever heareth and doeth theſe Sayings of mine, and doth according to them, I will liken him unto a wiſe Man, which built his Houſe upon a Rock: And the Rain deſcended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that Houſe; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a Rock.—And every one that heareth theſe Sayings of mine and believeth them not, nor doth according to them, ſhall be likened unto a fooliſh Man, which built his Houſe upon the Sand: And the Rain deſcended, and the Floods came, and the Winds blew, and beat upon that Houſe; and it fell, and great was the Fall of it.*

THE

S.E.R.

SERMON IV.

LAMENT. iii. 39.

Wherefore doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Puniſhment of his Sins?

THERE is not perhaps, throughout the whole Range of Creation, a Creature ſo apt to repine at his Condition, ſo impatient under the Hardſhips and Inconveniencies of it, as the Creature Man; and yet perhaps, there is no other Being in the Univerſe beſides himſelf, that has had ſuch extraordinary Experience of the Divine Goodneſs in promoting his Happineſs, or, what ſhou'd, for ever ſtop his complaining, that has labour'd more to defeat this gracious End by repeated Acts of Ingratitude and Diſobedience. Inſtead of

murmuring that he was not at firſt placed in a more exalted Situation in the Scale of Exiſtence, and freed from thoſe Infirmities and Diſorders, which unavoidably attend the Condition of Humanity, he ſhou'd be extremely thankful that he was not placed lower, that he was not created deſtitute of thoſe ennobling Privileges, which give him a diſtinguiſhing Preeminence above the Creatures around him, and that he was not poſſeſs'd of ſuch a Rank of Being, as ſet him only one Remove from ſtupid, inſenſible Matter. For, exclusive of the Will of God, he might as well have been a Worm as a Man; nay, he might as well have continued blended with that unconſcious Maſs of Earth, from whence he was taken, as that he ſhould be raiſed out of it, have the Image of his Maker impreſs'd upon him, and be informed with a rational and living Soul. And ſhall a Creature thus ennobled and dignified, by the free and voluntary Goodneſs of his Creator, complain of his Situation, complain that he is not more raiſed, more happy, and more perfect in every reſpect? If the mere Privilege of Exiſtence was an Act of the Divine Favour, ſhall he be diſſatisfied, when he is not only poſſeſſed of that, but alſo with ſuch Powers and Faculties as give him a glorious Superiority

rity above the reſt of the Creatures? It muſt be very ungrateful in him to complain, that he is not indulged with every Thing that God can give, when, at the ſame time, he has received more from him than he had any Right to expect. What Reaſon, Man, wouldſt thou have had for Complaint, had thy Maker but juſt endued thee with animal Life and Motion; for it was entirely owing to his good Pleaſure, and not to any Merit of thine, that thou waſt endued with any thing elſe; and canſt thou murmur and repine, when he has not only made thee a living Creature, but alſo hath endued thee with a rational, intelligent Soul, by which thou art enabled to reaſon and reflect, to compare paſt, preſent, and to come; to paſs in Imagination beyond the Boundaries of this lower World, and even to hold a Correſpondence with the Inhabitants of Heaven? Surely a Being ſo nearly allied to the Angels by the ſpiritual Part of his Nature, can never be uneaſy at his Condition, without the higheſt Ingratitude towards his Maker, who placed him in it.

And if we further conſider, that moſt of the Evils, which Man labours under, are in a great Meaſure owing to his own Miſmanagement, to an Abuſe of his Free-will in

making wrong and foolish Elections; this ſhould for ever ſilence his complaining, and, inſtead of throwing the Blame upon his Maker, ſhould make him entirely throw it upon himſelf, upon his own Follies and Vices. 'Tis true, the Condition of our Nature, and the Circumſtances of our Being, expoſe us to ſeveral unavoidable Evils: The Matter of which our Bodies are compounded, and the Changes which are wrought in the Conſtitution of them by the Change of the Elements, all conſpire to introduce Diſorders into our Frame, and at laſt bring on a total Diſſolution. But then, theſe Evils are greatly aggravated and increaſed by our own Miſconduct. What a Train of Miſeries, Diſeaſes and Deaths, attend upon Luxury, Debauchery, and all ſort of Vices, which Mankind would either have never experienced at all, or not in ſo a malignant a Degree, had they not indulged themſelves in unlawful Gratifications? There is hardly a Day paſſes, in which we do not ſee ſome or other ſacrificing the Comforts and Conveniences of Life, nay their very Lives, to a favourite Sin, and that without any ſeeming Apprehenſion with regard to Conſequences. Indeed, it was a gracious Appointment of Providence, that, in the natural Courſe of Things, Puniſhment

ſhould

ſhould generally, even in this World, be the Effect of Sin, and that every Violation of the Divine Law, eſpecially when often repeated, ſhould more or leſs be followed by Suffering. And is there any room for Complaint in ſuch an Appointment? If we will complain, let us complain of ourſelves, of our own Folly, in thus becoming the Inſtruments of our Miſery. We obſerve the Effects which Sin has upon others, nay, we ſenſibly feel the Effects of it upon ourſelves; and yet, when we are guilty of it, we repine at the Evils which it brings along with it. Let us only complain of the Evils we endure, when we ceaſe to be the Cauſe of them ourſelves, when we ceaſe to be intemperate and debauched, malicious and revengeful; in ſhort, when we ceaſe to indulge ourſelves in any ſort of Vices: For, as for natural Evils, ſuch as ariſe from the Conſtitution of our Bodies, and the Circumſtances of our Being, they would be quite eaſy and ſupportable to us, were they not aggravated and increaſed by our Exceſſes and Extravagances. We ſhould then indeed be ſubject to Diſorders and Decays, but our Diſorders would be leſs violent, and our Decays more ſlow and gradual: We ſhould, like ripe Fruit falling from the Trees, drop into our Graves at a good old

Age, and ſhould feel none of thoſe Pains and Convulſions, which generally attend Death, or the Separation of Soul and Body. For it is owing to our own Sins, and the Sins of our Forefathers, as alſo to the Sins of thoſe about us, that we are beſet with ſo many Evils and Afflictions, and that theſe Evils and Afflictions are ſo very pungent and trying to us. *Wherefore then doth a living Man complain, a Man for the Puniſhment of his Sins?* In enlarging further upon which Words, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

I. That Man has no Reaſon to complain of his Situation in the Scale of Beings, if he only reflects upon the general Syſtem of the Univerſe, the Rank which he holds in it, and how many other Creatures are greatly inferior to him, *Wherefore doth a living Man complain?*

II, That his Complaints are ſtill more groundleſs, if we conſider that the Evils he complains of are generally the Effects of his own Vices and Indiſcretions. *A Man for the Puniſhment of his Sins?* And,

III. That thoſe very Evils themſelves, which are thus intended as a Puniſhment of his Sins, carry likewiſe, if properly uſed, their

their own Antidote along with them, and prove an effectual Means of training him up to Virtue and Happiness.

I. I am to shew, That Man has no Reason to complain of his Situation in the Scale of Beings, if he reflects upon the general System of the Universe, the Rank which he holds in it, and how many other Creatures are greatly inferior to him. *Wherefore doth a living Man complain?*

It is highly probable from what we observe in that small part of the Creation which falls under our Notice, that there are in the Universe various Orders of Beings rising in Perfection one above another, and that from the highest and most perfect Order there is a gradual Descent, Step by Step, till the Descent comes to terminate in the very lowest. For as far as our Observation can carry us, we see that one Species of Creatures is closely succeeded by another, somewhat inferior in Nature and Perfection; and that this Succession is continued from the human Race to those groveling Reptiles which are almost devoid of Sense and Motion. Therefore what we observe to be Fact with regard to the Creatures below us, even to the very Confines of lifeless, insensible Matter; we may presume, from Analogy,

does likewiſe hold good in Reſpect of thoſe Creatures above us, and that the Chain is continued upwards, by Links one larger than another, till it aſcends to the higheſt and moſt perfect created Beings; between whom, and their almighty Creator, there muſt always remain an infinite Diſtance. Now in this wonderful Chain, or Scale of Exiſtence, it was entirely an Act of the Divine Pleaſure which ſhou'd be ſuperior, and which inferior. After the moſt perfect Syſtem of Creatures was formed, there was room for leſs perfect, and ſo on, till the whole Scale was compleated. And ſuch was the Goodneſs of the Deity, that he never ceaſed exerting his creative Power, ſo long as he cou'd draw into Being any Creatures that were capable of the Benefits of Exiſtence; and that cou'd make, by a right Uſe of their Faculties, the Sum-total of their Happineſs exceed that of their Miſery. If any Species of Creatures, thus capable of enjoying Happineſs, had been wanting in the general Syſtem, the Chain muſt have been broken, and Diſorder and Confuſion would inevitably have enſued.

Does Man then complain, that he is not left out of the Creation? No, this is not his Grievance. He only complains, that he had not a Rank aſſigned him among the ſuperior Orders

Orders of Beings, among Angels and Archangels, and other ſpiritual Intelligences, that are no way connected with Matter. But how abſurd and unreaſonable is ſuch a Complaint? For ſuppoſing he had been placed in a more exalted Situation, there muſt nevertheleſs have been Creatures to fill the Place he now poſſeſſes, otherwiſe a Chaſm would have been made in the Univerſe, and theſe Creatures, in order to qualify them for that Rank, muſt have been endued with thoſe very Powers and Faculties, which conſtitute the particular Nature of Man. So that there would ſtill have been the ſame complaining Creature, uneaſy with his Condition, and arraigning that Divine Providence which placed him in it, as there is at preſent. The Truth is, God could, no doubt, have made all Creatures equally perfect, and without the Diſtinction of Superior and Inferior; but then an infinite number of Creatures, leſs perfect, would have been denied the Privilege of Exiſtence. For after the moſt perfect Syſtem was formed, all thoſe various Orders of inferior Beings, which are now placed in different Situations, and are made capable of enjoying different Degrees of Happineſs, could have had no Place at all in the Creation. It ſeemed therefore more agreeable to the Goodneſs of the Deity,

that,

that, after the most perfect System of Creatures was made, there should, to continue the Scale, be others, falling gradually below one another in the Perfection of their Nature, that might rejoice in their Existence, rather than that one single Species of Beings, on account of their superior Excellence, should entirely engross his Regard, and hinder him from communicating more diffusive, extensive Happiness. And if it is confess'd, that infinite Wisdom contrived this Plan in such a manner, as that all must either be full or not coherent, we cannot but allow that the Creature Man must be placed somewhere. And surely we ought not to complain of his Situation, when we know that it was allotted him by infinite Wisdom, influenced and directed by infinite Goodness.

Besides, let him only compare himself with the Creatures below him, with such as have a Rank assigned them in the animal and brute Creation, and, instead of complaining, he will find sufficient Reason for Gratitude and Thankfulness. 'Tis true, they are endued with such Perceptions and Passions, as prompt them to pursue what is for their Preservation in this Life, and to avoid whatever tends to their Prejudice. But then, this seems rather to be the Effect of Mechanism, than

than of Thought and Design. They can hardly, I believe, be said to know when they act, or for what Purpose they act; but are governed by what we call Instinct, which is a Principle entirely distinct from Reason and Free-will; and therefore they may more properly be said to be acted upon, than to act themselves. Whereas Man, besides those Passions and Appetites, which he has in common with the Brutes, is also endued with a free, thinking, and rational Soul, which enables him to deliberate before he acts, and to propose some Scheme or Design in whatever he undertakes. This Soul likewise, disdaining to be confin'd to the low groveling Enjoyments of this Life (which are the only Enjoyments brute Creatures are capable of) wanders into Futurity, anticipates as it were the Happiness of it, and expatiates beforehand in a Life to come. And when this Soul is actually separated from the Body by Death, which is the End of all the other Creatures, it does not die along with it, but survives the Separation, and is qualify'd to flourish in immortal Youth, through a boundless Eternity. And can a Being thus ennobled and dignify'd above the rest of the Creatures in this lower World, who has a Soul that is immortal, and who does not lay down his Being with his

Life,

Life, like the Beaſts that periſh; can a Creature, I ſay, poſſeſſed of ſuch glorious Privileges, not upon account of any Merit in himſelf, but merely through the Beneficence of his Creator, complain of ſome diſagreeable Circumſtances that attend his Condition? That be far from him; and let it not be ſaid that one ſo highly favoured by his Maker, as to be placed at the Head of this viſible Creation, ſhould yet be ſo inſenſible of the diſtinguiſh'd Favour, and ſo ungrateful to the Author of it, as to murmur and repine, as if he was rank'd among the Beaſts that have no Underſtanding, and did not partake, by his ſpiritual Part, of the Nature of Angels.

But his Complaints will ſtill appear more groundleſs, if we conſider,

II. That the Evils which he complains of, are generally the Effects of his own Vices and Indiſcretions: *A Man for the Puniſhment of his Sins.* I ſay, *generally*, the Effects of his own Vices: For it muſt be allowed, as was before obſerved, that he is liable to ſome Evils, which may properly be called natural ones, by his very Make and Conſtitution, ariſing from the Matter of which his Body is compounded. Even if he had always preſerved his Innocence, and had never tranſgreſſed the Command of his Maker, he would

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nevertheleſs have been ſubject, without a Divine Interpoſition, to gradual Decays, which at length would bring on certain Death. For the Privilege of Immortality, which was promiſed to *Adam* on Condition of his Obedience, was entirely a ſupernatural Grant, to which nothing that he could have done himſelf, according to the eſtabliſhed Courſe of Things, would ever have entitled him. But then though he could not have been exempted from Death, and thoſe Diſorders which muſt neceſſarily be previous to it, but by a ſupernatural Grant; yet it is probable, had he not ſinned, his Diſorders would not have been ſo trying, nor his Death ſo painful. Many of thoſe Evils, at leaſt which Man now labours under, would either entirely have been prevented, or conſiderably alleviated. There would then have been none of thoſe Miſeries among Men which are the viſible Effects of Intemperance and Luxury, of Luſt and Debauchery; nor would they have had any Experience of that Variety of Diſtreſſes, which immediately proceed from the Cruelty and Oppreſſion, from the Injuſtice and Perfidiouſneſs, both of themſelves and of thoſe about them. In ſhort, they are ſuch Vices as theſe that make this World ſo uncomfortable and melancholy a Place as it is at preſent, that fill

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it with Groans and Sighs, and that turn it into a dismal Scene of Misery and Wretchedness.

Indeed it has always been found, that in Proportion as Vices have increased, human Life has been more or less haunted with Evils and Afflictions. When Sin was first introduced into the World, Man could not but immediately feel a very sensible Change in himself, a Change much for the worse. Instead of that well-ordered Harmony of Affections, which before subsisted, the Passions became rebellious, Reason but faintly opposed their Encroachments, and the whole Man was frequently thrown into a violent, and unnatural State; the Consequence of which must, in some Degree, be Misery and Uneasiness to him. These Disorders and Commotions within, soon shew'd their Effects in his outward Behaviour, and hurried him into all kinds of Extravagancies and Excesses; and these Extravagancies and Excesses were the certain Parent of numberless Mischiefs. Hence that Variety of Diseases, which is accompanied with a Variety of Deaths, and by which the Life of Man is so very much shortened. For some time indeed, there could be no visible Alteration made in this Respect. The natural Strength of his Body would at

first

firſt enable him to bear up againſt them: But when, by repeated Attacks, this Strength was impaired, and the Vices which made the Attacks were continually increaſing, he then was diſabled from holding out any longer, but was obliged to ſubmit himſelf to the Mercy of ſuch Invaders. Thus Sin produced Diſeaſes, Diſeaſes produced Death, and thus in Proceſs of Time, the Life of Man was contracted to a Span; and what is moſt to be lamented, that very Span was crowded with Pain and Uneaſineſs.

Nor are the Evils of Diſeaſes and Death the only ones which Men's Vices have infeſted the World with. What are Poverty and Diſgrace, Anxiety and Deſpair, and all thoſe tormenting Cares with which human Life is miſerably oppreſſed, but the natural Effects either of Avarice or Ambition, of Injuſtice and Oppreſſion, of Pride and Revenge in others; or of Idleneſs and Extravagance, of Luxury and Intemperance, in ourſelves. We may trace up moſt of the Evils we feel and complain of, to ſome of theſe Cauſes as their original Source. And therefore it but ill becomes Creatures, who are thus inſtrumental to their own Miſery, to murmur and repine, when they labour under it. For it is enough to vindicate Providence, and to

ſilence

ſilence all Complaints againſt it, that they were created with a Freedom of Choice, and that they had in their Power to abſtain from ſuch Things as would tend to their Prejudice. If they will abuſe that Freedom and Power, and convert what was intended to promote their Happineſs, into an Occaſion of Miſery to them; there is no Help for it: They may blame themſelves, but can never with Juſtice lay the Blame upon Providence. God is ſufficiently juſtified in appointing that Sin ſhould be followed by Suffering, as it is a Thing moſt fit and reaſonable, that every Offender ſhould, in ſome Degree, be puniſhed; nor has the Sinner any room to complain of this Appointment, when he conſiders that Sin was his voluntary Choice, and that it was entirely left to himſelf either to avoid or practiſe it.

And there will be even leſs Reaſon for Complaints of this Nature, if we proceed to ſhew,

III. That the Evils themſelves, which are thus intended as a Puniſhment of his Sins, carry likewiſe, if properly uſed, their own Antidote along with them, and prove an effectual Means of training him up to Virtue and Happineſs. Thoſe very Pains and Diſorders, thoſe Diſeaſes and Deaths, which are owing

to

to our Vices, and which make up a great Part of the Miſeries of human Life, are ſo many Memento's of our approaching Fate, and continually remind us of our making Preparation for that eternal State, where there ſhall be no more Death, neither Sorrow, nor Crying, neither ſhall there be any more Pain. And though, while we are in our frail and diſtemper'd Bodies, theſe Things muſt be grievous and afflicting to us; yet as they ſerve to withdraw our Affections from the Enjoyments of this Life, and to fix our Hearts on that Place where true Joys are only to be found, they may rather be look'd upon by us as Matter of ſpiritual Rejoicing than of Murmuring and Complaint. For were we always to enjoy an uninterrupted Flow of Health and Proſperity, and never to experience any of thoſe Pains which pierce a ſickly and diſtemper'd Body, we ſhould be too apt to cry out with St. *Peter*, "It is "good for us to be here," to confine all our Thoughts and Regards to the preſent World, and not have any Inclination of ſeeking after a better.

Nay, the very Shortneſs of Life occaſion'd by our Sins, and yet of which we ſo often-times complain, is preventive of a great many Miſchiefs to Mankind, to which a longer

Term of Years would probably ſubject them. Was the Age of *Methuſelah* the Standard of human Life, and did Men know of nothing that could hinder their living up to it, they would in all likelihood be encouraged to go on in Sin, from a Preſumption that it was time enough to begin to repent, when they drew near to the End of their Journey. For this Deluſion, we find, Men put upon themſelves, when they know that Life is much more ſhort and uncertain. What then would they do, were they ſure it would reach to nine hundred or a thouſand Years? They would then ſet no Bounds to their Wickedneſs; by which means this World would become a moſt diſmal Scene of Fraud and Injuſtice, of Rapine and all ſorts of Violence. It was therefore wiſely ordered by Providence, that thoſe Sins which produced this Effect, namely, the Shortneſs of human Life, ſhould be leſſened by this very Effect, and that Men ſhould be prevailed upon to live better, from the Conſideration that they were not to live long.

And as to thoſe Evils, ſuch as Poverty, Shame, and all thoſe Diſquietudes and Occaſions of Uneaſineſs, which proceed from the Cruelty and Injuſtice, from the Perfidy and Unfaithfulneſs of thoſe about us, they will

will furniſh us with ſo many Inducements not to put our Confidence in any Child of Man, but to betake ourſelves to God in all our Diſtreſſes; to cultivate a Friendſhip and Familiarity with him, which is independent of, and no way connected with the Friendſhip of the World; and amidſt all the Changes and Chances of this mortal Life, to lay hold upon him as a faithful Protector and Rock of our Salvation. In the moſt trying Circumſtances of Diſtreſs, we ſhall find him a God at hand, and not a God afar off, a God ever ready to comfort and aſſiſt us, to apply Balm to our Maladies, and to refreſh and gladden our afflicted Hearts with the enlivening Smiles of his Countenance.

Thus thoſe very Evils and Afflictions which are brought upon us by our own Sins, and the Sins of others, may even be converted, if it is not our Fault, to our greateſt Advantage, and be made ſubſervient to the promoting our everlaſting Intereſt. For ſuch is the Goodneſs of the Deity towards us, that even when we have involved ourſelves in Miſeries by our Vices, he contrives a Way whereby thoſe Miſeries may prove a Means of our Happineſs, and prevent that Deſtruction from falling upon us, from which there ſeem'd hardly a Poſſibility of eſcaping. Does Man

then complain of the Evils which he brings upon himſelf; or when they are brought upon him, does he complain that they bring along with them the Means of having them removed? If he complains of thoſe Evils which he brings upon himſelf, he complains of his own Folly and Wickedneſs; and then his Complaints are rightly lodged. But, if when the Evils are brought upon him, he complains that they likewiſe bring along with them the Means of having them removed, his Complaint is extremely fooliſh, and argues not more Ingratitude to his Maker, who was thus graciouſly pleaſed to draw Good out of Evil, than of Blindneſs to his own Intereſt.

And therefore, to conclude; If we will complain, let us complain of ourſelves, of our own Obſtinacy and Perverſeneſs, in defeating as much as poſſible, the very End for which we were created. We were created to be made happy, and were furniſhed with Means neceſſary for that gracious Purpoſe. We were placed in ſuch a Rank of Being, as that we might have lived comfortable and eaſy, had not our Vices, with their Conſequences, prevented it: And even when we had thus involved ourſelves in Miſery by our Vices, ſuch was the Kindneſs of God towards us, that he made that very Miſery capable of

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producing Happineſs to us. In a Word, our bountiful Creator has ſpared no Pains that might any way contribute to promote our Intereſt; and, if we will but ſecond his gracious Intentions towards us, by our ſincere Endeavours to ſerve and obey him, we may reſt aſſured that he will not fail, both in this World and in the World to come, to make all Things work together for our final Good.

SERMON V.

PSAL. XIX. 11.

—And in keeping of them there is great Reward.

IN the Purſuit of Happineſs, which all Men naturally deſire, it is melancholy to obſerve, how much the Generality are miſtaken about the Means of attaining it, and how greatly they deviate from the Path that leads to it.

Some expect to find it in Riches, Honours, and other worldly Acquiſitions; and accordingly ſpare no Pains that can any way put them in the Poſſeſſion of them.

Others, experiencing the Emptineſs of all ſuch Enjoyments, and how inſufficient they are of themſelves to ſatisfy their Longings, do not look upon them as the End or ſovereign Good itſelf, but convert them into the

Means or Inſtruments of acquiring it. They expend their Riches upon their Luſts, and make their Honours a Screen to the moſt diſhonourable Actions, behind which they can indulge themſelves in them, without the Imputation of Cenſure, or the rude Inſpection of a prying, inquiſitive World. Yet here too is Diſappointment and Vexation of Spirit: Repeated Gratifications of their ſenſual Appetites create Loathing and Diſguſt, and the Pleaſure that attends them does by no means make amends for the Pain that ſucceeds them. For unlawful Enjoyments not only carry along with them their own natural Puniſhments, as they bring upon the Body various Diſorders; but likewiſe affect the Mind with a Senſe of Guilt, ariſing from a Conſciouſneſs of having acted contrary to the Law of Nature and Reaſon, and the expreſs Law of God.

To remove which Senſe of Guilt, others have endeavoured to perſuade themſelves out of the Belief of a God, a Providence, and a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments. For if they could once bring themſelves to be fix'd in this Atheiſtical Perſuaſion, they might then hope to be in ſome ſort eaſy in their Vices; and indeed this is the Courſe which Libertines and Freethinkers take, in order

order to arrive at the greateſt Degree of Happineſs which they think themſelves capable of. They labour to reſolve all Religion and religious Eſtabliſhments into Prieſtcraft and Cunning; and by that Means to diſſolve all the Obligations of Duty, which might reſtrain them in their Practices, or curb their beloved Appetites. But all Attempts of this ſort are inſufficient for their Purpoſe. The moſt that they can do, is, to wiſh that there was no Foundation for Religion, nor any Truth in it. But are their Wiſhes able to ward off the Stings and Reproaches of their Conſcience? Or can they be eaſy and enjoy themſelves in their Sins, upon a bare Preſumption, that they will never be called to an Account for them? For aught they can tell there may be a future Reckoning, and with all their boaſted Reaſon they have never been able to prove the contrary. So that they can never advance farther in their Infidelity, than a State of Doubt and Suſpence; which is far from being an happy and ſatisfactory State. They know not but that there may be a God, and another World; and they know that if there are, the Effects of their Vices will certainly be Miſery to them: And therefore while they continue in their Vices, they cannot but be under ſome Dread and

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Apprehenſion, leſt they ſhould be convinced when it is too late, of their fatal Deluſion. What Pleaſure then can the Libertine take in his impious and immoral Practices, when he comes to reflect ſeriouſly with himſelf about what ſhall become of him hereafter. He has ſome Preſages of a future Reckoning, which he cannot entirely baniſh; and theſe never fail of giving him Uneaſineſs upon his taking a Survey of his paſt wicked Life.

The Truth is, all the Methods Men uſe to reconcile Vice and Happineſs, are fruitleſs and vain: They are direct Contradictions to each other, and are no more able to ſubſiſt together, than Things of the moſt oppoſite, diſagreeing Natures. Where Sin is, there naturally will be Uneaſineſs, however Appearances may varniſh it over; and we may lay it down for an undoubted Truth, that a wicked Man is always more or leſs a miſerable Man. In a Word, all Schemes of Happineſs, which Men propoſe to themſelves from ſinful Courſes, are deſtructive of that Happineſs, and inſtead of affording them the promiſed Satisfaction, are always found to end in Miſery and Trouble. They are ſuch Schemes as are only calculated for giving Pleaſure in the giddy and thoughtleſs Seaſons of Life, but are, in the ſober Intervals

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of Thought and Reflection, the greateſt Grief and Torment to a Man.

For it is only the virtuous and good Man, the Man who uniformly walks in the Way of God's Commandments, that can poſſibly arrive at any laſting Satisfaction. This the Pſalmiſt had experimental Knowledge of: For after mentioning ſeveral Excellencies peculiar to the Law and Statutes of the Lord; ſuch as *their converting the Soul, and making wiſe the Simple; rejoicing the Heart, and enlightening the Eyes*; as *more to be deſired than Gold, yea, than much fine Gold*; *ſweeter alſo than Honey and the Honey-comb*; he cloſes all he had to ſay in their Favour by adding a Circumſtance, which included in it every Thing that could engage Men to the Obſervance of them, and which he could aſſure them was true from his own Experience, namely, that *in keeping of them there is great Reward.* For *moreover, by them*, ſays he, *is thy Servant taught, and in keeping of them there is great Reward.*

Now a Regard to our Intereſt in other Caſes is a Principle which of all others chiefly influences and governs our Conduct. Whatever appears to us to be for our Advantage, we ſpare no Pains in purſuing, and however miſtaken we may be with Regard to

the Means of attaining it, or as to what it conſiſts in, we always find our Deſires after it to be uniform and the ſame. If therefore we can make good the Pſalmiſt's Obſervation, which by happy Experience he found to be true, namely, *that in keeping of God's Commandments there is great Reward*; or in other Words, that Religion is our higheſt Intereſt, Men muſt, if they act conſiſtently with themſelves, and have Regard to their Intereſt, not fail to practiſe the Duties of Religion. And that the Practice of Religion is the moſt effectual Method we can take to promote our Intereſt, or that the *Keeping of God's Commandments is attended with a very conſiderable Reward*, will, I hope, appear, if we conſider,

I. That to obſerve God's Commandments, and to live according to the Rules of Religion, is to live like reaſonable Creatures, and according to the Law of our Nature.

II. That he who thus governs and regulates his Life, acts moſt prudentially in Reſpect to the Attainment of what is moſt deſirable in this World, And,

III. That, beſides the outward Advantages he enjoys by being Religious, he infallibly ſecures to himſelf, in whatever Circumſtances he may happen to be plac'd, the

the inward Peace and Tranquillity of his Mind.

1. Then I am to conſider, That to obſerve God's Commandments, and to live according to the Rules of Religion, is to live like reaſonable Creatures, and according to the Law of our Nature. It will readily be allowed, that it is eſſential to the Happineſs of every created Being to live according to its Nature, or, which comes to the ſame Thing, to employ all its Powers and Faculties in ſuch a Manner, as may beſt anſwer the End for which it was created. For Inſtance, the Brute Creatures act according to the Law of their Nature, when they make the Gratification of their ſenſual Appetites the only Object of their Purſuits and Deſires. For as they are not formed for any other kind of Enjoyment, they are as happy as their Nature is capable of; when in the Gratification of theſe, they follow the uniform Dictates of what we call Inſtinct, which is a Law they have it not in their Power to deviate from, and which they will inviolably keep to, unleſs hinder'd by ſome outward Reſtraint.

Again, the Angels, or ſpiritual Beings, who have no Connection with Matter, act in a Way moſt ſuitable to their ſpiritual Nature,

ture, when in the free and vigorous Exerciſe of their Faculties, they are engag'd in the refined Contemplation of ſpiritual, intellectual Objects, in adoring the unfathomable Perfections of the Father of Spirits, the Immenſity of his Works, and the Myſteries of his Providence. Theſe are Employments beſt ſuited to their Nature, and therefore beſt calculated for making them happy.

But the different Nature of Man, requires a different Sort of Happineſs. He is a Creature compounded of Body and Spirit; and as by the bodily Part in his Compoſition he is allied to the Beaſts that have no Underſtanding, ſo by his ſpiritual Part does he claim Kindred with the Angels. To act according to his Nature then, that is, in ſuch a Manner as may beſt anſwer the End of his Being, and conſequently promote his Happineſs, he muſt take Care that the reſpective Powers of Soul and Body act in their proper Sphere, that the ſuperior Powers command, and the inferior Powers obey, and that a due Subordination be kept up between them. For as he is compounded of two Parts ſo very diſtinct in their Nature, it is neceſſary to the Well-being and Happineſs of the whole Man, that neither ſhou'd be entirely neglected, but that each of them

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ſhou'd have ſuch a Share of his Regard and Attention, as that the mutual Intereſt of both may be promoted. If he makes his Happineſs to conſiſt ſolely in the Gratification of his ſenſual Part, he enjoys only the Happineſs which he has in common with the Brutes, and not the Happineſs of a Man; nay, it wou'd have been better and happier for him to have belonged to the Claſs of irrational Beings, who are entirely governed by ſenſual Appetites, and not to have been poſſeſs'd of Reaſon and Underſtanding, than, when he is poſſeſſed of them, to diſregard their Dictates, and be deaf to their Admonitions. For then he wou'd have liv'd according to his Nature, and have had no Checks from within, nor felt any of that Uneaſineſs with which a Life oppoſite to the Law of his Being, is conſtantly attended.

And, if, on the other Hand, he entirely places his Happineſs in intellectual Enjoyments, and endeavours to diſengage himſelf from all Commerce with ſenſible, material Objects; he aims at Happineſs that is too refined for him, and is as much ſuperior to the Condition of Humanity, as the Happineſs he propoſed to himſelf from ſenſual Enjoyments is below it. For while he is a Man, that is, while he is a Creature that is com-

compounded of Body as well as Spirit, he muſt indulge it in its moderate Gratifications, and not think of detaching himſelf as it were from thoſe Wants and Deſires, thoſe Paſſions and Appetites, which enter into and conſtitute his very Nature. For let him accuſtom himſelf never ſo much to abſtract Speculations, the Calls of his ſenſual Part will frequently remind him that he is not all Spirit, but that he has a Body as well as Soul to provide for. The Truth is, the proper Happineſs of Man, as far as he can be happy in his preſent corrupted State, conſiſts in preſerving, as much as poſſible, ſuch a Harmony and Agreement betwixt the reſpective Powers of Soul and Body, as that they may act in friendly Concert with each other, and mutually contribute towards enabling him to lead a Life ſuitable to his Nature, as that he may neither, by indulging immoderately the ſenſual Part, bring himſelf upon a Level with the Beaſts that have no Underſtanding; nor by affecting a Degree of Spirituality too exalted for the Condition of his Being, aſpire to ſuch a State of Perfection, as his Frailties will ſoon convince him he has no juſt Pretenſions to. For either to ſtoop too low, or to raiſe himſelf too high, is inconſiſtent with his Happineſs, as he is a Crea-

Creature that partakes both of the Nature of Brutes, and the Nature of Angels; and therefore a Medium in his Behaviour ſeems to be beſt ſuited to the Nature of a Creature of ſuch a mix'd Compoſition.

Now Religion or the Commandments of God, enjoin nothing but what is ſuited to the Happineſs of a Creature that is thus particularly conſtituted; and in requiring Men to be Religious, we only require them to act as Men, and according to the higheſt Reaſon. For he that governs his Life by the Rules of Religion, governs himſelf by a Law, the wholeſome Reſtraints of which are the Barriers to ſecure his Happineſs, to prevent his unruly Paſſions from breaking in upon the Empire of Reaſon, and to maintain that good Oeconomy and Order within, which the gracious Author of our Being firſt intended in our Original Formation. Without ſuch a Law to check and reſtrain our Behaviour, and without ſome Degree of Conformity to it, we ſhou'd find ourſelves perpetually in a diſordered State; we ſhou'd find ſeparate Intereſts formed in our Breaſts, and continual War waging between the reſpective Powers of Soul and Body; which muſt needs harraſs

and even utterly deſtroy the Peace and Tranquillity of our Minds.

When Man was firſt created, no doubt, but he was created perfect: He came out of his Maker's Hands with his Underſtanding clear, with his Will unbyaſſed, and his Paſſions unperverted. In ſhort, the whole Man was like a well regulated State, where there is a due Subordination of Parts, and where all the Powers, whether ſuperior or inferior, mutually conſpire to promote the general Good.

But when by an Abuſe of his Free-Will, Moral Evil was introduced into the World, and that Harmony, which before ſubſiſted, was in Danger of being totally deſtroy'd; Religion and the Divine Laws then interpoſed, and endeavoured to repair thoſe Ruins in our Nature which were occaſioned by the Fall, and to reſtore the whole Man, as much as it was poſſible, to the ſame happy and regular Condition in which he was created. And ſurely, as this is the Intent of Religion, it muſt be for the Intereſt of every Man, to conform to its Laws; ſince by ſuch a Conformity, he makes the neareſt Approaches to the Original Perfection of his Nature, which is certainly his greateſt Happineſs.

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To make Proviſion only for the ſenſual and more ignoble Part in our Compoſition, is to lead the Life of a Brute, not of an intelligent, rational Creature, who is formed for more refined Enjoyments, than to grovel upon the Earth, and to employ all his Care about the Body and its Gratifications. For Religion teaches us that we are Men and not Beaſts, that the Happineſs which we enjoy in common with them, is not our proper Happineſs, and that, if we wou'd act up to the Dignity of our Nature, and approve ourſelves worthy of thoſe enobling Privileges with which it is adorned, we muſt have more exalted Notions of that Happineſs, which is ſuited to our Nature, and take thoſe Methods of obtaining it, which the Author of our Being has preſcribed to us. And I will venture to affirm, that whoever governs his Life by theſe Preſcriptions, takes more Satisfaction in it, and has a higher Reliſh of all preſent Enjoyments, than he who is ſolely governed by his Paſſions, and who knows no other Pleaſures but the Gratification of them. For Religion abridges a Man of no innocent and natural Gratifications. It only denies him ſuch Things, as however they may pleaſe and flatter his ſenſual Appetites at preſent, will certainly in the End prove prejudicial to him. In ſhort,

whatever conduces to his Intereſt, as a Reaſonable Creature, it allows him the Enjoyment of; but what wou'd confine his Happineſs to that ſmall Pittance of it, of which the Brutes have an equal Share with himſelf, there it only debars him. So that you ſee, the more Religious any Man is, the more reaſonable does he ſhew himſelf; inaſmuch as he acts conſiſtently with himſelf and as it becomes him, and has an Eye in his Behaviour to the joint Welfare of both Parts in his Compoſition. And as Man by following the Rules of Religion, acts moſt reaſonably, and conſequently moſt for his own Well-being conſidered as Man: So,

II. Does he act moſt prudentially in Reſpect to thoſe outward good Things, which are reckoned moſt deſireable in Life. For he generally enjoys more Health, has a better Proſpect of raiſing his Fortune, lives in greater Credit and Reputation among the Generality of Mankind, and meets with better Treatment from them, than thoſe who are indifferent to Religion, and pay little or no Regard to the Duties of it. And indeed theſe are Advantages on the Side of Religion, which might induce, one ſhou'd think, even worldly minded Men to the Practice of it,

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were they not unaccountably blind to their own Intereſt.

As for Health, a very little Obſervation of what paſſes before us, will ſoon make us ſenſible how much Religion and the Practice of its Duties are conducive to it. Who does not know that the Man of Sobriety, and Temperance, who lives in Moderation, and never tranſgreſſes the Bounds it preſcribes, is in a fairer and more likely Way of enjoying and preſerving his Health, than he who indulges himſelf in all Sorts of Senſuality, who riots in Luxury, and carries his Exceſs to the utmoſt Height of Extravagance? The one is lightſome and eaſy, feels none of thoſe Diſorders which proceeed from Surfeits and an Overcharge of Nature, and has conſtantly a regular and even Flow of Spirits. The other is either all Life and Spirit, or elſe overcaſt with Gloomineſs and Melancholy; either raging in the violent Burnings of a Fever, occaſioned by his Intemperance, or, when the Fumes of his Exceſs are evaporated, ſunk to the loweſt Degree of Sadneſs and Dejection. It may not indeed always happen, that the ſober and temperate Man has a better Share of Health, than the vitious and debauched; for there are many accidental Cauſes, which may prevent Sobriety and

Temperance from producing their natural good Effects. But this I will venture to ſay, that, ſuppoſing the natural Strength of their Conſtitutions to be equal, and no outward Accidents to intervene, the Sober and Regular would enjoy better Health, than the Debauched and Irregular; which is enough for the preſent Purpoſe. For all that I contend for, is, that Sobriety and Temperance have a natural Tendency to promote Health, and that their oppoſite Vices have a natural Tendency to weaken and deſtroy it.

Further; the Man who practiſes Religion, or who obſerves the Divine Laws, takes the moſt effectual Method of raiſing his Fortune and getting an Eſtate. For Religion enjoins him to be juſt and upright in all his Dealings, to be ſcrupulouſly exact in his Promiſes and Engagements, and, in his whole ſocial Commerce, to have Regard to that equitable Rule of our Saviour, "Of doing as he would "be done by." And theſe are Virtues, which ſeldom fail to promote the Advantage of the Perſon that is poſſeſſed of them; for they procure him Truſt and Confidence among Men, and encourage them to deal with him, rather than with thoſe who are known to want theſe Virtues. Beſides, Religion teaches him Induſtry in his Calling; and *that*, every

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one knows, is the moſt likely Means of making him flouriſhing and proſperous.

Again; the Advantage a religious Man has in Point of Reputation, is very conſiderable. He is ever ſtudious of maintaining a fair and unblemiſhed Character; and to this Purpoſe takes care to diſtinguiſh himſelf, by a ſteady Attachment to Virtue and Truth, to Juſtice, and Temperance; and is always cautious to keep himſelf as clear as poſſible, of any Action that may reflect Diſgrace upon him, or expoſe him to Cenſure. And indeed the World has generally ſo great a Regard to a Man, who is thus deſirous of gaining its good Opinion by ſuch laudable Means, that it ſeldom, if ever, refuſes to give him his due Praiſe, and applaud his Virtues. Even thoſe who are no great Friends to Religion, becauſe they know that it is an Enemy to their Vices, are afraid of attacking his Character, and of throwing malicious Aſperſions upon him; being well aware, that there will always be a powerful Party on his Side, who will declare in his Favour and vindicate his Innocence. For, bad as the World is, Virtue is not yet ſo much diſcouraged, but that it can command its Votaries a laſting Reputation, notwithſtanding the combin'd Powers of Vice to blaſt and deſtroy it.

Laſtly, a religious Man meets with better Treatment from all: *For who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?* Not that a good Man, who lives according to the Rules of Religion, is always ſecured from Harm: For we do not want Inſtances of Perſons, ſuch as our Saviour, and his Apoſtles, and the firſt Chriſtian Martyrs, who have ſuffered purely for their Religion; but only that in general they are leſs liable to it; inaſmuch as their whole Behaviour is ſo inoffenſive, as that Men can have no juſt Pretence for doing them an Injury. Religion teaches them to wrong no-body, to provoke no-body deſignedly, to do all the kind and good Offices they are able to thoſe about them, and to carry themſelves towards all, with Civility and Good-nature. And therefore they may reaſonably expect, that fewer will be inclined to wrong and injure them, and that many will be diſpoſed to make them ſuitable Returns of good Offices; at leaſt, that they will meet with more favourable Uſage, than if they were diſtinguiſh'd by a contrary Character and Behaviour.

Upon the whole, a religious Man may juſtly be reckoned the wiſeſt Man, even with Regard to his worldly Intereſt. All God's Commands are of ſo beneficial a Nature and Tendency,

dency, that Obedience to them is our greateſt Happineſs: For they enjoin us nothing but what is for our Advantage, nor forbid us any thing but what is hurtful to us. In a Word, no Man, who rightly conſiders Things, and underſtands his real Intereſt, will ever diſobey them; and I dare appeal to the Experience of every one, who has made God's Laws the Rule of his Conduct, whether he has not profited by them in a temporal Senſe, and whether he has not found a great many Advantages with Regard to his ſecular Affairs, immediately ariſing from his Obſervance of them. I now proceed to conſider,

III. That, beſides the outward Advantages a Man enjoys by being religious, he infallibly ſecures to himſelf, in whatever Circumſtances he may happen to be placed, the inward Peace and Tranquillity of his Mind. And what greatly contributes towards this Peace and Tranquillity, is, that Religion ſuppreſſes and keeps under, the Paſſions of Anger, Malice, Envy, and Revenge, which when indulged, are very uneaſy and tormenting to the Breaſt that harbours them; and cheriſhes in their Stead a peaceable and forgiving Diſpoſition, which is ever ready to exert itſelf, even towards its Enemies, in Acts of Love and Benevolence, of Friendſhip and Good-nature.

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For when any Paſſions begin to ariſe within us that are boiſterous and turbulent, and that ruffle and diſconcert the Repoſe of the Soul, Religion but commands, and all is immediately huſh'd into a Calm; Anger is appeaſed, Malice and Envy loſe their Venom, and Revenge is ſatisfied: The ſocial and benevolent Affections get Poſſeſſion of the Heart, baniſh from thence whatever may occaſion Uneaſineſs and Diſcontent; and, by a perſuaſive kind of Eloquence, reſtore the natural Order and Harmony of our Frame. Thus by Religion's interpoſing its Authority, and by our paying a due Regard to its ſalutary Laws, we are enabled to keep the Paſſions in Subjection to Reaſon, to check their violent and extravagant Sallies, and to prevent that Diſorder and Diſquietude within us, which an unreſtrained Indulgence of our vicious Appetites would neceſſarily occaſion.

But neither is this all; what ſpeaks moſt Peace to the Mind of a Religious Man, is, the Conſciouſneſs of his having recommended himſelf by his vertuous Behaviour to the Favour and Approbation of his heavenly Father. When he can upon good Grounds aſſure himſelf that God is his Friend, that he is reconciled to him, and hath admitted him into Terms of Mercy and Forgiveneſs

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through the Merits of his Saviour; this is a Conſideration, which above all others gives him moſt Comfort and Satisfaction. Let the World frown or ſmile, look angry or pleaſed, it is all the ſame to him, ſo long as he knows that he is approved of by his God, that he has nothing to fear from him, but that he has every Thing to hope for, which a wiſe and good Providence ſees fit to beſtow upon him. In ſuch a Situation as this, his Mind will be eaſy and ſatisfied, whatever be the State of his outward Circumſtances. If he is viſited with Afflictions of any Sort, with the Loſs of his Friends, or any other trying Misfortune, he can nevertheleſs poſſeſs his Soul in Patience under them, as he knows they come from one who is concerned for his Welfare, and who, he knows, conſults his Good, as well in his ſevere as in his mild Diſpenſations. For he is told by an Apoſtle, *that whom the Lord loveth he chaſteneth, and ſcourgeth every Son whom he receiveth.* Even the Proſpect of Death hath nothing terrible in it to one, who hath made it the conſtant Employment of his Life to prepare himſelf for it. He conſiders it as the End of his Sorrows, and the Beginning of his Happineſs; as that which removes him from this Vale of Miſery, and tranſlates him

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to a State, where the Lord *Jehovah* ſhall be not only his exceeding great, but his everlaſting Reward.

And therefore to conclude, if we wou'd live like Men, and wou'd have ſomething beſides our Shape to diſtinguiſh us from the Brutes; if we wou'd take the likelieſt and ſafeſt Way to enjoy and preſerve Health, to raiſe an Eſtate, to procure a good Reputation, and to have the Reſpect and Eſteem of all we converſe with; or if we wou'd be eaſy and quiet in our Minds under all Conditions and Circumſtances of Life, either in Affliction or upon the Approach of Death; or if, laſtly, when we bid an eternal Farewell to this World and all its Enjoyments, we wou'd be admitted to partake of the Bliſs of glorified Spirits; let us live according to the Rules of Religion, and keep God's Commandments. For a Conformity to theſe will both furniſh us, with the Comforts and Neceſſaries of Life, and alſo when we come to the Concluſion of it, and our Souls have taken their Flight from theſe Bodies of Clay, will procure us this joyful Welcome from the Mouth of our Judge, *Come ye bleſſed Children of my Father, receive the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World.*

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SERMON VI.

HEB. i. 1, 2.

God, who at ſundry Times, and in divers Manners, ſpake in Time paſt unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in theſe laſt Days ſpoken unto us by his Son.

THE Apoſtle here points out to us the various Revelations of the Divine Will, which at ſundry Times and in divers Manners, God was pleaſed to vouchſafe to Mankind for the better Regulation of their moral Conduct. God ſpake unto the Fathers at ſundry Times. His Will was not communicated all at once to them, but was conveyed by little and little, according as they were beſt able, or beſt diſpoſed to receive it: And this was done in divers Manners; ſometimes by an intelligible and diſtinct Voice from Heaven, ſome-

ſometimes by Dreams and Viſions, ſometimes by immediate and ſenſible Inſpiration, and ſometimes by Miracles or ſupernatural Works.

Theſe were the ſeveral Ways in which God revealed his Will to Mankind by the Prophets, both before and under the Law, but the Method he made Uſe of to reveal it to us under the Goſpel is entirely different. That Will of his, which at ſundry Times, and in divers Manners, he partially made known in Time paſt unto the Fathers, by the Prophets, he hath in theſe laſt Days diſcovered wholly unto us by his Son, in one ſingle diſtinct View. The Son of God himſelf is now the Diſpenſer of his Father's Will, and we have now the whole Counſel of Heaven declared to us by him, who came down from Heaven for that very Purpoſe; and who therefore muſt be ſuppoſed to have a clear and perfect Knowledge thereof, ſufficient to inſtruct thoſe whoſe great Intereſt it is to be acquainted with it? From hence we may obſerve, that there has all along been a gradual Opening or Revelation of the Divine Will to Mankind, in Proportion as their Tempers and Diſpoſitions prepared them for the Reception of it. They had ſome Glimmerings thereof before the Law, when God was pleaſed to favour them with par-

particular Manifeſtations of himſelf; they had a clearer Inſight into it under the Law, by Means of *Moſes* and the reſt of the Prophets, and they were thoroughly inſtructed in it under the Goſpel, when God vouchſafed to ſpeak unto us by his Son. For *God, who at ſundry Times, and in divers Manners, ſpake in Time paſt unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in theſe laſt Days ſpoken unto us by his Son.* From which Words we may take Occaſion to obſerve theſe three Things.

I. That in the Ages preceeding Chriſtianity, Mankind were not entirely left to themſelves to find out the Will of God, but were generally aſſiſted by a divine ſupernatural Revelation, which helped them to the Knowledge of it.

II. That this Revelation was gradual, not communicated all at once, but at *ſundry Times, and in divers Manners.* And,

III. That the Revelation of God's Will vouchſafed to us by his Son in the Goſpel, is the moſt perfect Revelation that ever was, or ever will be vouchſafed to the World.

I. We may obſerve, that in the Ages preceeding Chriſtianity, Mankind were not entirely left to themſelves to find out the Will of God, but were generally aſſiſted by a divine, ſupernatural Revelation, which helped

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ed them to the Knowledge of it. The Light of Nature, or unaſſiſted Reaſon, was inſufficient for that Purpoſe; and therefore God Almighty, in Compaſſion to human Weakneſs, was pleaſed to afford them an additional Light. They could perhaps, by making a right Uſe of their intellectual Faculties in contemplating the Things that were made, find out one ſupreme Being, that was the wiſe Author of theſe Things; and from thence could trace out the Outlines, as it were, of their Duty towards him: But then theſe were ſo faintly and obſcurely drawn, as that they were left in Ignorance as to thoſe Parts of it, which were ſtill of great Importance to them to know. Here Revelation was found to be expedient, and accordingly God, to remove the Ignorance of his Creatures, and to enlighten their Underſtandings, as much as it was neceſſary, made frequent Diſcoveries of his Will to them. Before the Flood, he converſed with our firſt Parents in Paradiſe, as alſo after they were driven out from it, inſtructing them how to demean themſelves in both theſe Conditions. He alſo held Conference with *Cain*, upon his being wroth that no Reſpect was had to his Offering, when his Brother's was approv'd of, and tells him, that if he did well, he ſhou'd

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certainly be accepted, but if he did evil Sin lyeth at the Door. And when, notwithſtanding the ſeveral Warnings which God gave Men of his Hatred to Wickedneſs, the whole World had corrupted their Ways, he raiſes up *Noah*, the firſt Preacher of Righteouſneſs, to inform them of their approaching Ruin, if they did not take Care to prevent it by a timely and ſpeedy Repentance. *Noah* was favour'd by God with particular Revelations of his Will, and theſe Revelations he faithfully communicated to the Men of his Days. So that it was not through their Ignorance that they were guilty of ſuch crying Enormities, but it was entirely the Effect of their own wilful Obſtinacy and Perverſeneſs in Wickedneſs. God never puniſhes Men for tranſgreſſing his Will, when he has not afforded them ſufficient Means of coming to the Knowledge of it. It is through their own Fault, that ever they offend to ſo great a Degree, as to make themſelves unworthy of the Divine Mercy; and they have nothing to blame but their own Folly, when God is provoked to deſtroy them in their Sins. So that, you ſee, before the Flood, Men had frequent Revelations of the Divine Will, whereby they were admitted to a clearer and more certain Knowledge of

their Duty, than the Light of Nature or Reaſon alone cou'd have furniſhed them with; which if they had attended to, as they ought to have done, wou'd have effectually ſcreen'd them from the dreadful Vengeance of an univerſal Devaſtation.

After the Flood indeed there was no immediate Occaſion for a Divine Revelation. The Want of it was ſupplied to thoſe who ſurvived that aſtoniſhing Deſtruction, by its being ſtill freſh in their Memories, and by having the Ruins of the old World a ſtanding Monument of God's Hatred to Sin, and of the dreadful Puniſhment which awaited the Sinner. Accordingly we do not read of any Revelation that was made to Mankind from the Time of the Flood, that is, after *Noah*'s Days, to the Time of God's calling *Abraham* out of *Ur* of the *Chaldees* to go into the Land of *Canaan*. However we find that in this intermediate Space, a Senſe of the true God and his Religion was ſo far loſt in the World, that it became expedient by ſome Means or other to give a Check to the growing Impiety of the Times. Idolatry begun to get Footing, and had gained ſo much Ground in *Abraham*'s Time, that it was neceſſary, in order to maintain the true Worſhip and Religion from being deſtroyed, to call him from his Country

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and Kindred, that ſo he might reform by his Example the ſeveral idolatrous Nations in which he ſojourned. And that he might be qualified for ſo important a Work, God was pleaſed to make to him frequent Diſcoveries of his Will, and to diſtinguiſh him by ſuch peculiar Favours and Privileges as made him be taken Notice of, and even look'd upon with an Eye of Veneration by thoſe he converſed with. A Man ſo eminent for his Piety and ſteady Attachment to the true God, muſt bear a great Sway with, and have a ſtrong Influence upon, Mens religious Conduct; and accordingly we find that the Behaviour of one, who was ſo remarkably favoured by Heaven, had a very good Effect upon the Manners of the Times. For when they ſaw that God viſibly interpoſed in his Behalf by plaguing thoſe who treated him ill, as was evidently the Caſe with Regard to the Princes of *Egypt*, and by giving him Victory over thoſe Kings, who had taken his Brother Captive, they were ſtruck with a Kind of Religious Awe, and cou'd not but be fill'd with a lively Senſe of the Strength and great Power of the Lord *Jehovah*.

The ſame ſuperintending Providence protected, and the ſame Divine Revelations were all along vouchſafed, to the Reſt of his Deſcen-

dants; ſo that there were never wanting ſome of his Family to inſtruct Mankind in their Duty, either by their own Example, or by Miracles performed in the Defence of Religion and Virtue. They were ſet up as ſo many Lights to the World, which diffuſed the Rays of Divine Truth and Knowledge into the moſt diſtant and retired Parts of it, and both their Sojournings and Diſperſions, their Dangers and Deliverances, were excellent Means of propagating the true Worſhip of God, and deſtroying Idolatry. And after the Law was given by *Moſes*, the Benefit whereof extended to Strangers, and was not ſolely confined to the Commonwealth of *Iſrael*, Revelations were more frequently communicated by the Prophets; whereby Mankind came to have a better Knowledge of their Duty, and to be better diſpoſed for receiving a more perfect Revelation. Upon the Whole, there never was a Time, when Men were entirely left deſtitute of all ſupernatural Diſcoveries of the Divine Will: God hath all along afforded them more than human Aſſiſtance to enable them to arrive at the Knowledge of it, and it muſt be owing to ſome Defect in themſelves, that ever they tranſgreſs it in ſuch a Manner thro' Ignorance, as to be render'd unfit Objects of the

the Divine Goodneſs and Compaſſion. I come now to obſerve,

II. That the Revelation of God's Will, before the Time of Chriſtianity, was gradual, not communicated all at once, but *at ſundry Times and in divers Manners.* It was communicated according as Men's Tempers and Diſpoſitions, and other the like Circumſtances, prepared them for it. The peculiar Exigence of the Times was what God had ſpecial Regard to in the Diſcovery of his Will, and he delivered it to the World in ſuch a Seaſon, and in ſuch a Way, as was beſt ſuited for anſwering the gracious Ends for which it was intended. Had it been delivered all at once, and in the ſame Manner, without having any Reſpect to the particular Qualifications of the Perſons to whom it was delivered, it wou'd probably have done more Harm than Good, and inſtead of being a Bleſſing and Favour to them, wou'd have prov'd the greateſt Miſchief. There is a particular Propriety and Fitneſs in all God's Diſpenſations, which make them of the greateſt Uſe and Advantage to Mankind, and which plainly ſhew how deſirous he is of contributing to their Happineſs by the moſt effectual and beſt contrived Methods.

Revelation hath always kept Pace with, and obſerved a certain Proportion to Men's Moral Improvements, and according as they have been more or leſs diſpoſed to receive it, or had Occaſion for it; ſo has it been communicated to them in Weight and Meaſure. After Man was created, he was immediately informed who was the Author of his Being, and from thence cou'd not but naturally know what were the Duties he ow'd him. Among theſe, Obedience to one ſingle Command, was the principal Thing God inſiſted upon from him, leaving him at Liberty in all other Reſpects, to do juſt what he pleas'd. This was the Whole of the Revelation which was then afforded him, excepting ſome few Directions that related to the Conveniences of Living, and the better Management of the Creatures that were under his Dominion. And indeed in ſuch Circumſtances, this was all the Revelation he cou'd poſſibly have Occaſion for. When his Duty was confin'd to one Particular, it was eaſy for him to act up to it, and when that was once propounded, he cou'd not want Revelation to have it further explained.

After the Fall, when Man's Reaſon was enſlaved by his Paſſions, and the Powers of his Mind were thrown into Diſorder, it was neceſſary that a clearer Revela-

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tion of the Divine Will ſhou'd be vouchſafed in order to reſtrain him from committing thoſe Vices, to which he was ſtrongly inclined by the Corruption of his Nature. The moral Duties were then become more numerous, and conſequently more difficult to be performed, and therefore God thought fit to afford him ſuch ſupernatural Helps, as might aſſiſt and encourage him in the Practice thereof, and tend to remove gradually the bad Conſequences of the Fall. Accordingly ſundry Revelations, at ſundry Times, and in divers Manners, were vouchſafed for that Purpoſe, all giving Men Hopes of God's Mercy and Good-will towards them, and ſome obſcurely pointing out their future Recovery, which was to be effected by the Seed of the Woman.

The Law of *Moſes* in particular, was the cleareſt and moſt full Revelation that had hitherto been made to Mankind, and gave the moſt undeniable Evidence of its Divine Original. The Sort of Worſhip it enjoined, was not the moſt perfect in itſelf that might have been deviſed, but yet was admirably adapted to the Genius and Temper of the People, for whom it was intended. God knew them to be a proud and oſtentatious Kind of Men, who were extremely taken with outward Shew and Grandeur; and therefore gave them a Religion which was exceedingly

ſet off with pompous and coſtly Ceremonies, to the End that they might be kept more firmly attach'd to it; and be hinder'd from running into the Idolatries of the Nations about them, to which they were ſtrangely addicted. The Sanctions likewiſe, by which Obedience to the Law was enforced, were of a temporary Nature; and reach'd no further than the Things of this Life, which were the only ones that cou'd work upon ſenſual and worldly-minded Men, ſuch as the *Jews* were; though it muſt be acknowledged, that upon the Compariſon, they greatly exceeded their Neighbours in the Practice of all Moral and Social Virtues.

In a Word, the Law of *Moſes*, conſidering the Times and the Qualifications of the People to whom it was delivered, contributed as much as poſſible towards the Advancement of Piety and Goodneſs in the World; and therefore had it been a more perfect Revelation, it wou'd not have been ſo uſeful, nor ſo well have anſwered the Ends for which it was deſigned. It is enough that it is ſuited for that particular Time, and that particular People, and that though it did not reveal fully the whole Will of God, yet it reveal'd ſo much of it, as was proper to be known, and as much as Men cou'd bear. It ſet the moral Duties in a clearer

clearer and ſtronger Light than they had ever been before, and pointed out a Way whereby Men's honeſt Endeavours would be accepted, prefiguring unto them by Means of Sacrifices, that full, perfect, and ſufficient Sacrifice, which was to be offered up in the Fulneſs of Time for the Sins of the whole World. And afterwards, when Men's Minds begun to be better diſpoſed to embrace the Subſtance inſtead of the Shadow of Religion, there aroſe truly-inſpired Prophets in the later Ages of the *Jewiſh* State, who delivered to Mankind a ſtill more perfect Revelation of the Divine Will. They every where recommend real and ſubſtantial Piety, and labour to draw Men off from outward Obſervances, which were not enjoined by the Law as any way meritorious or acceptable of themſelves, but only intended as a Means to prepare them for a more perfect and glorious Diſpenſation.

Thus, you ſee, upon the whole, God has always had an Eye to the particular Qualifications of the Perſons to whom he hath made a Revelation of his Will. He hath always delivered ſo much thereof to them as they were capable of bearing, or of improving to their Advantage; and therefore it was neceſſary that it ſhould be communicated gradually, according as the Exigence of thoſe Perſons required,

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to whom it was communicated. When God foreſaw that Men wanted only a ſmall Diſcovery of his Will, and that they would have abuſed to their Prejudice a larger Diſcovery of it, he dealt with them accordingly, making their Good the principal End of all his Diſpenſations towards them. And when he found them prepared for a clearer and fuller Revelation, he vouchſafed to grant them that, complying in every Reſpect with their Weakneſs, and applying ſuch Remedies, as were beſt ſuited to promote their Welfare. God could, indeed, have given all at once a full Revelation of his Will to Mankind, and could, no doubt, have diſpoſed them for the Reception of it, as well immediately upon the Fall, as in any other ſucceeding Period of Time; but then the Queſtion is not, what God could have done, but what was proper for him to do. It is one of the Rules of the Divine Conduct, to deal with all Creatures according to their Natures: Agreeably to which, as Man is a free and moral Agent, God will never lay any Reſtraint upon his Will, but what is conſiſtent with moral Liberty, which probably would not have been the Caſe, had God, immediately upon the Fall, communicated to him a perfect Revelation of his Will, and diſpoſed him all on

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a ſudden for improving under it. That he did not at firſt communicate ſuch a perfect Revelation is very evident, and his not doing it, is a ſufficient Argument that it was not proper to do it; ſince a wiſe and good God cannot be ſuppoſed to omit the doing of any thing that is proper or beneficial to his Creatures. He does not act arbitrarily, or at Random towards them, but ſuits the Time and Method of all his Diſpenſations to their Wants; beſtowing upon them ſuch Things, at ſuch a Time, and in ſuch a Manner, as are moſt proper for advancing their Good, without infringing upon the Liberty of their Choice.

Thus hath God dealt with Mankind, with Regard to the Revelation he vouchſafed to them before the Revelation of the Goſpel of Chriſt. He delivered his Will to the World in Time paſt *at ſundry Times and in divers Manners*, according as the Times cou'd bear it, and as the Minds of Men were prepared to receive it; but in theſe laſt Days, when he found the World in ſuch a Condition, as to be diſpoſed for a perfect and complete Revelation of his Will, he accordingly vouchſafed it by his Son, who was poſſeſſed with every Qualification that might fit him

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for ſo high and important a Truſt. Which brings me to obſerve,

III. That the Revelation of God's Will, vouchſafed to us by his Son in the Goſpel, is the moſt perfect Revelation that ever was, or ever will be vouchſafed to the World. When I ſay the moſt perfect Revelation, I mean the moſt perfect that Man in his preſent State can have any Occaſion for; inaſmuch as it furniſhes him with the Knowledge of every Thing that is neceſſary for him to know, or that is able to make him *wiſe unto Salvation*. In this Reſpect, all other Revelations before were extremely defective, leaving Men in Ignorance about ſeveral important Points, which were of the laſt Conſequence; though, at the ſame Time, as we have already obſerved, theſe very Revelations were as full and clear as Men's Tempers and Diſpoſitions were then capable of receiving: But conſidered abſtractedly, and in themſelves, they were far from being ſo perfect as not to admit of great Improvements; and which therefore Men might reaſonably expect God would certainly improve in his good Time, when he found them diſpoſed for benefiting thereby.

And here I ſhall juſt mention ſome of thoſe Imperfections, which in general did cleave

cleave to all Revelations, before the Revelation of the Goſpel. They were all imperfect, inaſmuch as they did not afford Men ſufficient Aſſurance of a State of Rewards and Puniſhments after this Life, nor ſatisfied them as to the Efficacy of Repentance to procure Pardon and Forgiveneſs, nor promiſed them any Supply of Divine Grace and Aſſiſtance ſufficient to ſtrengthen their Weakneſs, or enable them to make good their Reſolutions of Obedience for the future. Theſe were the material Defects of all thoſe Revelations, both before and under the Law, as will readily appear to any one who will be at the Pains of enquiring into them. Whereas the Goſpel-Revelation is extremely clear and ſatisfactory as to all theſe Particulars. Life and Immortality are thereby brought to Light, and we are fully informed of the Means by which we may render that Immortality happy and deſirable to us. The Means are Repentance and Amendment; and provided theſe be honeſt and ſincere, the Merits of our Saviour will ſupply all other Deficiences in our Conduct, which either ariſe from our Ignorance or Negligence. And to encourage and excite us the more in the Practice of our Duty, the Holy Spirit of God concurs with our virtuous Endeavours, confirming

firming and ſtrengthening us in all Goodneſs, and leading us, if we do not reſiſt its godly Motions, to eternal Life and Happineſs. And ſurely a Revelation which explains all this to us, which gives us the ſtrongeſt Aſſurances of an Eternity beyond the Grave, and acquaints us with the Means and Conditions, whereby we may make that Eternity happy to us, is as full and perfect a Revelation as we can poſſibly have Occaſion for. What can we want more than to be clear'd of all our Doubts about another World, to have our Hopes of Pardon upon Repentance, entirely ſatisfied and confirmed, and to be under the Influence and Direction of the Divine Grace, which will lead us into all Virtue and Goodneſs? And as we can want no clearer nor more perfect Revelation, ſo we may be ſure that it is the only one that will ever be vouchſafed to the World.

If the Goſpel Revelation contains every Thing neceſſary to our Salvation, every thing that is neceſſary for us to believe, and to know, and to practiſe; if it furniſhes us with all the Means of Grace and Hopes of Glory, that can poſſibly be imagin'd, we cannot expect, and it wou'd be ſuperfluous in God to beſtow any further Revelation. He will not gratify our Curioſity in revealing abſtruſe

Things

Things to us, ſuch as may ſerve to amuſe our Heads, and afford us Matter for nice Speculation; but will only reveal ſuch Things to us, as may ſerve to mend the Heart, and to have a good Influence upon our Lives and Practice. And when he hath done this, all further Revelations become needleſs; and therefore ſhou'd we ſuppoſe God to make any further Revelations; we muſt ſuppoſe him to do ſomething in vain, to do Things that are needleſs, which is an Abſurdity we can by no Means charge upon him, who is a Being of infinite Knowledge and Perfection. So that the Goſpel Revelation, which containeth every Thing that pertaineth to Life and Godlineſs, whereby we may be made Partakers of the Divine Nature, is not only the moſt perfect, but alſo the final Revelation that ever will be made to Mankind. We muſt expect no other; for it is the laſt Effort of the Divine Goodneſs towards procuring for Us eternal Salvation. *God in Time paſt ſpake unto the Fathers by the Prophets, but now in theſe laſt Days he hath ſpoken unto us by his Son.* He cannot therefore ſend any other Perſon, who is better acquainted with his Will, or who can give a more perfect Diſcovery of it. For as the Son is God, as well as the Father, he muſt have an intimate Knowledge

ledge of the whole Divine Counſel, and muſt therefore be qualified to reveal ſo much of it to us as it will ever be neceſſary for us to know. We may underſtand all in the Goſpel that we have Occaſion to know now, and thoſe who come after us by a continual Succeſſion to the End of the World, will likewiſe be ſupplied from thence with all the Knowledge they ſhall want; and it is probable that ſome Parts of it will afterwards be explained to *them*, which on Account of Predictions therein contained, but not yet accompliſh'd, have hitherto lay concealed in Obſcurity.

The proper Inference then which I ſhall make from this Diſcourſe, is, that as the Goſpel is the laſt and moſt perfect Revelation that ever will be made to the World, ſo does it require from us ſuitable Improvements in all Virtue and Goodneſs. As our Duty is therein fully explained and moſt ſtrongly enforced, as it leaves us in Ignorance of nothing that is neceſſary in order to our Salvation; the leaſt that we can do, is, to conform our Lives to its Precepts, and to adorn its Doctrines by a ſuitable Behaviour. *God now ſpeaks to us by his Son, ſee then that ye refuſe not him that ſpeaketh.* For if they eſcaped not who refuſed him that

ſpake

ſpake on Earth, much more ſhall not we eſcape, if we turn away from him in our Lives that ſpeaketh from Heaven. If we hearken not to him, but ſtop our Ears, and harden our Hearts againſt all his Exhortations to Virtue, and Diſſwaſives from Vice, he will ſpeak to us no more, he will leave us to the Effects of our own Folly, and to eat the Fruit of our own Doings. This is the laſt Time he will reveal himſelf to us; and therefore let us take good Heed to his Words, and ſhew that we do ſo by our Lives and Converſation. In a Word, the Grace of God that bringeth Salvation, hath now once for all appeared unto all Men; and therefore, as it teaches us, *let us deny all Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, and live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World; looking for that Bleſſed Hope, and the glorious Appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.*

SERMON VII.

MARK xvi. 16.

He that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; but he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.

THERE is not a Text in the whole Goſpel, which contains more intereſting Doctrine, or Doctrine that has been more miſunderſtood, than that which I have read to you. The Chriſtian founds his Hopes of Happineſs upon the Truth of the former Part of it, as it makes Faith the indiſpenſable Condition of his Salvation; without which he is conſcious, from an inward Senſe of his many wilful Tranſgreſſions, he can have no juſt Pretenſions to it. And the Infidel condemns the latter Part of it, as it bears hard upon his Unbelief, and threatens him with ſuch Puniſhment, as he thinks is hardly conſiſtent

with the infinite Goodneſs of the Deity to inflict. Perhaps both the one and the other, may take the Words in too literal a Senſe, and either not give them that Latitude, which the whole Tenor of the Goſpel requires; or elſe reſtrain them to a confin'd Interpretation, as may beſt ſuit with their prepoſſeſſed Notions, though not with the Truth and Reaſon of Things. The Believer, for Inſtance, may poſſibly imagine, by attending ſolely to the literal Meaning of the Words, that a bare Faith will ſave him, and that if he only believes in Chriſt, and is baptized into his Name, though he pays no Regard to his Precepts, he ſhall be entitled to eternal Happineſs. For it is not ſaid, *He that believeth and doth good Works, but he that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved.* From ſuch a partial Underſtanding of Scripture, 'tis much to be feared, that many have perſwaded themſelves, that Faith is enough to diſtinguiſh them to be Chriſtians, and that they have no Occaſion to practiſe thoſe Duties, in order to Salvation, which are enjoined in the Goſpel, ſince Faith will ſupply every other Defect, and even cancel the Guilt of their moſt daring Tranſgreſſions.

On the other Hand, the Infidel runs into as great a Miſtake, when he concludes from the

the plain Senſe of the latter Part of the Text, that all Men without Exception ſhall be damned, who do not believe the Goſpel. For he triumphs in this Interpretation, and thinks that if it be a juſt one, he has nothing to fear on Account of his Unbelief; ſince it repreſents the Doctrine in ſo abſurd a Light, as that it cannot but appear unworthy of a juſt and good God, and ſhocking to every thinking, rational Man. Thus does he ſcreen himſelf from the threaten'd Puniſhment under his own Interpretation; and though he has none of theſe alleviating Circumſtances to plead in Behalf of his Infidelity, as thoſe who never enjoy'd ſufficient Means of Conviction, yet he thinks himſelf ſafe, ſo long as the Abſurdity of the Doctrine carries a ſtrong Argument along with it, of its manifeſt Falſity.

To clear up therefore thoſe Miſtakes, which both Believers and Unbelievers have fallen into, from taking the Words of the Text in too literal a Senſe; I ſhall

I. Shew, what we are to underſtand by that Faith, which is here ſaid to be the Means of obtaining for us Salvation. *He that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved.*

II. How far the Want of it will ſubject us to Puniſhment: *But he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.*

I. I am to ſhew, what we are to underſtand by that Faith, which is here ſaid to be the Means of obtaining for us Salvation: *He that believeth and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved.* Now it is obvious to all, who are ever ſo little converſant in the Holy Scriptures, that one ſingle Act or Duty of Religion is uſually put for the Whole of it, and oftentimes promiſes the ſame Reward, as is annexed to univerſal Obedience. For Inſtance, Salvation is offered to thoſe who love the Lord, who fear him, and who call upon his Name; and yet it is plain theſe are but partial Acts of our Duty, and ſeem at firſt Sight to have more Merit aſcribed to them than they really deſerve. But the Truth of the Caſe is this, there is ſuch a cloſe Connection between the ſeveral leading Duties of Religion, that he who performs one of them aright, muſt perform all the reſt. For he who truly and ſincerely loves God, cannot but expreſs this his Love in his whole Behaviour towards him, by paying an uniform and conſtant Obedience to all his Laws. He likewiſe who entertains a juſt Awe and Reverence of the infinite Perfections of his Nature, of his infinite Power, Wiſdom, and Goodneſs, muſt, if he acts under a due Influence of this Awe and Reverence, be extremely afraid of offending

ſending againſt ſo great and ſupreme Majeſty, and will ever be careful to govern his Life according to thoſe ſacred Rules, which that Being who is able to ſave and deſtroy, ſhall think fit to preſcribe to him. And he who calls upon God's Name, who looks up to him as the Author and Giver of all good Things, and from whom alone he expects all that can contribute to make him either eaſy here, or happy hereafter, will not fail, if he hopes to be heard in what he calls upon him for, to behave with that Obedience and humble Submiſſion towards him, as is due from a Creature to his Creator; and accordingly will make it his Endeavour to have an equal and uniform Reſpect to all God's Commandments. In ſhort, he who ſincerely and not hypocritically performs any one ſingle Act of Religion, will at the ſame Time perform every other Duty of Religion. For there is no ſuch Thing as ſeparating them in Practice, however we may accuſtom ourſelves to diſtinguiſh between them in Speculation. And whether we love God, or fear him, or call upon him, as we ought, we muſt in Conjunction with each of theſe particular Duties, perform the whole Circle of Duties. They are like ſo many Links in a Chain, where all are connected, and dependent upon each other,

and where by moving one Link, Motion is communicated to all the reſt. Hence appears the Propriety of that Language in Scripture, by which particular Duties of Religion are ſaid to have the ſame Rewards annexed to them as univerſal Obedience. For if one leading Act of Religion rightly performed includes in it univerſal Obedience, it is no more than reaſonable that it ſhou'd be entitled to the ſame Reward.

To apply this to the Caſe before us; we find Faith in the Text, as alſo in many other Parts of the New Teſtament, conſidered as the only Condition of our Salvation. And indeed this is eaſily to be accounted for, when we reflect that Faith is an active Principle, which will not reſt in Opinion or Speculation, but prompts thoſe who are poſſeſs'd of it to a becoming Practice. Every Article of it is plainly connected with our Duty, and muſt therefore, if it be vigorous and ſincere, have a practical good Influence upon our Lives and Behaviour. For we may obſerve a certain progreſſive Motion from one Act of Faith to another, which all along furniſhes us with the moſt powerful and engaging Motives of Obedience. We firſt believe that Jeſus is the Chriſt, that he is that Saviour and mighty Deliverer, which both the Law and the Prophets clearly fore-

foretold was to come into the World. Hence we are led on to believe all those Doctrines and Precepts, all those Promises and Threatnings, which are contained in his Gospel. And when our Faith has carried us thus far, it will be strange if our Behaviour is not influenced by it, and changed for the better. For can any among us believe that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners, by offering up himself a propitiatory Sacrifice for us, without being deeply affected with a grateful Sense of his great Love and Goodness towards us, without expressing this our Sense in our whole Conversation, and making our Actions a visible Proof of our Faith? Can we believe in the Doctrines which he delivered to us, and in the Precepts which he taught us, and not at the same time make them the Rule of our Conduct and the chief Regulator of our Manners? Or can we believe in the Promises and Threatnings which he hath proposed to us in his Gospel, and yet be regardless of both the one and the other, neither encouraged by his Promises to aspire after the good Things which the Gospel tenders to us, nor deterred by his Threatenings to avoid the evil Things denounced? We may think we believe these great Truths, but we only think so, if our

Faith

Faith and Practice are not agreeable with each other, if we only believe, but do not live according as the Goſpel, which contains them, requires. For as a true and lively Faith takes in and embraces every Part of Revelation, ſo muſt every Article of that Faith operate upon our Behaviour, and excite us to the Performance of our Duty. In ſhort, the Man who is poſſeſs'd of it, and who ſuffers himſelf to be governed by it, is not a Chriſtian by Halves, one who thinks he believes, and yet does not practiſe, but is uniform and regular in all Chriſtian Duties, and takes care to order his whole Converſation according to the Rules of his holy Profeſſion. Now it is ſuch a Faith as this, a Faith, every Act of which is productive of good Works, that is propoſed to Mankind in the Text as the Condition of their Salvation. It is not a bare, hiſtorical Faith, a Faith which reſts in aſſenting to the Facts contained in the Goſpel; but a Faith which applies immediately to the Hearts and Conſciences of Men, and thereby becomes an effectual Meane of promoting true Holineſs in them, and of forming them to every good Word and Work. That ſuch a Faith as this, which is a conſtant and operative Principle of Action, and which never fails exciting

citing those, who are animated by it, to the Performance of their Duty in the ſeveral Branches of it, ſhould entitle Men to Salvation, is not at all to be wondered at: For it includes in it all thoſe Virtues and good Actions, which the Goſpel every where makes the Terms of our Salvation, all that we are required to believe and to practiſe, as the Means of obtaining it.

And when we further conſider, that Faith in Chriſt's Merits, which makes a Part of that ſaving Faith mentioned in the Text, and is either expreſſed or implied in all thoſe Paſſages in the Goſpel, where Salvation is offered to us, is always added to ſupply the Defects in our religious Performances, which are occaſioned either by our Weakneſs or Ignorance; we cannot but ſee ſtill more and more the Propriety of aſcribing Salvation to this Principle. For it is through Faith in Chriſt's Merits, that God is pleaſed to accept of our imperfect Obedience; ſince our beſt Actions could merit nothing of themſelves at his Hands. And it is by the Righteouſneſs of Chriſt imputed to us, and not by our own Righteouſneſs, that we are admitted into the Terms of Mercy and Forgiveneſs, and are called to a State of Salvation. For provided our Endeavours to live virtuouſly are ſincere, Faith in a crucified

fied Saviour will ſupply all our other Defects, and his precious Blood will waſh out the Stains of Guilt, occaſioned by our many Tranſgreſſions.

Thus, you ſee, what is meant by that Faith which is ſaid in the Text to be the Means of obtaining for us Salvation: It is ſuch a Faith, as that every Article of it is connected with ſome Part of our Duty, and is, according as it is more or leſs lively, productive of good Works in all who are poſſeſſed of it. And if, by Reaſon of the Weakneſs and Infirmity of our Nature, we find ourſelves unable to pay that perfect Obedience to the Will of God, which the Goſpel requires of us, it provides for us an Atonement, whereby the Divine Juſtice will be ſatisfied, our Sins abundantly pardoned, and, in Conſequence thereof, we, though Sinners, ſhall be ſaved. I now proceed to ſhew,

II. How far the Want of Faith will ſubject Men to Puniſhment: *But he that believeth not, ſhall be damned.* It would be cruel and uncharitable to ſuppoſe, that thoſe who either never heard of the Name of Chriſt, or who died before they could be admitted to ſhare in the Benefits and Privileges of Chriſtians, ſhould on Account of their unavoidable Unbelief be obnoxious to the Damnation

tion threaten'd in the Text. For though they do not come within the Terms of covenanted Mercy, as theſe only reach to actual Believers, yet as Chriſt is ſaid to be a Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World, for the Sins of thoſe who lived as well before as after his Coming, we may charitably hope, that his all-ſufficient Merits will extend to ſuch, and deliver them from the Puniſhment they would otherwiſe be expoſed to. We cannot think that God will be ſo rigorous and ſevere upon them, as to puniſh them for not believing what they never had propoſed to them. And yet as we know that *there is no other Name under Heaven whereby Men can be ſaved, but only the Name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*; we muſt, in Juſtice to the Goodneſs of God, be oblig'd to have Recourſe to this Name, as what alone can entitle them to the Divine Mercy. And therefore though ſuch have not an Opportunity of believing, they may nevertheleſs be ſaved through the Merits of Chriſt imputed to them. The Text, no doubt, admits of this Exception, and our Saviour never intended that it ſhould be interpreted without making it. When he ſays, *He that believeth not, ſhall be damned*, he only means ſuch, as after they have heard the Goſpel, and have have had all poſſible Evidence for the Truth

of

of it, do nevertheleſs reject it, by ſlighting the gracious Method of Mercy propoſed to them in it. And indeed it ſeems unavoidable, but that ſuch wilful Unbelievers ſhould expoſe themſelves to the threatened Puniſhment: For if they have tranſgreſſed God's Law, as they cannot but acknowledge they have done in many and repeated Inſtances; and if they are likewiſe ſenſible that every Tranſgreſſion of that Law muſt ſubject them to Puniſhment; and yet when a Scheme of Mercy is contrived to ſatisfy the Divine Juſtice, and to atone for their Offences, they will nevertheleſs ſpurn it from them, and neglect ſo great Salvation as it tenders to them, what can they expect but that they ſhould be puniſhed as their Obſtinacy deſerves. They will not be ſaved on the Score of Chriſt's Merits, and they know, or at leaſt might know, would they only reflect, that they cannot be ſaved on the Score of their own; ſo that there is nothing left for them to truſt to but the Mercy of God, though at the ſame Time they deſpiſe that Method of Mercy which he hath graciouſly offered to them. Such Men put it even out of the Power of infinite Goodneſs itſelf to ſave them, becauſe if they will refuſe to comply with the Terms which it ſhall propoſe, and will not take God

for

for their Guide, but chooſe to follow their own prepoſterous Ways, they have nothing to blame but their own Folly, ſhould they finally miſcarry.

It may poſſibly be ſaid, that there may be ſome who cannot find ſatisfactory Reaſons for believing the Goſpel after the ſtricteſt and moſt impartial Enquiry; and do we not think that God will make favourable Allowances to ſuch, and conſiderably abate the Severity of the Judgment denounced in the Text? In anſwer to which, it may be obſerved, with an excellent Advocate in the Cauſe of Chriſtianity, "That the "Unbelievers condemned in the Goſpel, are "ſuch, as *love Darkneſs rather than Light, "becauſe their Deeds are evil*; not ſuch, as "after the fulleſt and moſt impartial Conſide- "ration, cannot find Reaſons to believe the "Goſpel; that their Unbelief is owing to "faulty Cauſes, to vitious Prejudices, and "wrong Affections and Diſpoſitions of Mind, "to their hardening their Hearts, and ſhut- "ting their Eyes againſt Evidence. This is "there ſuppoſed to be the general Caſe of "Unbelievers; and their Guilt and Con- "demnation is repreſented as thereby highly "aggravated. If there be any particular Ex- "ceptions, they muſt be left to the Mercy "and Equity of the ſupreme Lawgiver; but

"ſuch

"ſuch Exceptions could not properly be taken "notice of in the Goſpel Law. It would "not be wiſe or fit, ſuppoſing a well attested "Revelation to have been really given from "Heaven of great Importance to Mankind, "to put the Caſe of any Perſons being ex- "cuſable in not believing or receiving it, "when laid before him. This would ſoon "be abuſed; the believing or receiving it "would be look'd upon as a Matter of Indif- "ference; and ſo the Deſign for which that "Revelation was given, would in a great "Meaſure be defeated."

It ſeems however ſcarce poſſible, that there ſhould be any ſuch Exceptions in a Chriſtian Country, where the Means of Conviction are ſo ſtrong and clear, where the Arguments for believing are ſo full and ſatisfactory to every unprejudiced Mind, and where nothing is wanting to make Men Believers, but only a Deſire of knowing God's Will, and an Inclination to practiſe it. For, as the Apoſtle obſerves, *if our Goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt: In whom the God of this World hath blinded the Minds of them which believe not, leſt the Light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt, who is the Image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them.* They are in Subjection to their vitious Appetites and Paſſions, and are ſtrongly attached

attached to the Gratification of them; and therefore 'tis no Wonder that they ſhould reject even a Revelation from Heaven, which teacheth them to deny *all Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly, in this preſent World.*

In ſhort, all Infidelity may be reſolved into Men's Vices, as the chief Motives to it. "When they are devoted to any of thoſe "Sins, which the Goſpel forbids under the "ſevereſt Penalties, they muſt either renounce "the Scriptures, or condemn themſelves. A "Man that is under the Power of ſtrong, "vitious Inclinations, and depraved Habits, "will of Courſe be prejudiced againſt a Re"ligion, which, if it be true, obliges him "to counteract and mortify his darling Appe"tites, and will not ſuffer him to be eaſy in "his licentious Courſes; and teaches him to "expect a dreadful Puniſhment in a future "State, as the Effect of his ill Conduct in "this. His Intereſt and Inclinations na"turally bribe his Judgment to pronounce "againſt ſuch a Religion, they give Force to "every Objection, and will hardly admit "him calmly to conſider its Proofs."

And when Men become Unbelievers upon ſuch Motives and Principles as theſe, it cannot ſurely ſeem hard or unjuſt that they

ſhould be puniſhed. As they are Tranſgreſſors of the Law of God, and will not accept of the Atonement provided for them to expiate their Guilt, they are obnoxious to Puniſhment. For God cannot conſiſtently, as far as we can judge, with his Holineſs and Juſtice, diſpenſe with the Tranſgreſſion of his Laws, without any Satisfaction being made for the Violation of them. And further, as they will not believe, becauſe they chooſe to ſin with as high a Hand as poſſible, without any Reſtraint or Controul, which they know their Belief in the Goſpel would unavoidably lay them under; they muſt of Courſe aggravate their Guilt and increaſe their Condemnation. For their Guilt is greatly heightened, not only as they reject the Terms of Salvation reach'd out to them in the Goſpel, which are the only Terms they can think of upon which they can ſafely depend, but alſo as they give a greater Looſe to their Appetites, than if they were influenced by the Precepts of the Goſpel; the Conſequence of which muſt neceſſarily be, that they will run into more notorious and flagrant Violations of the Divine Laws, and of Courſe expoſe themſelves to ſeverer and more intenſe Puniſhment. How ſuch Unbelievers as theſe, who diſpute God's Veracity, and will not believe in that Revela-

Revelation, which points out unto them the only Way of making themſelves happy, and who likewiſe pay no Regard to Right or Wrong further than as their own private Intereſt makes it convenient for them; how ſuch, I ſay, ſhould eſcape Puniſhment, is not to be conceived. They know that they have daringly and preſumptuouſly broke through God's Laws; they know likewiſe, that the Divine Juſtice requires that every Violation of them, in order to maintain their Authority, ſhould be puniſhed; and yet when God is pleaſed to provide an Attonement for them, which may expiate their Guilt, they obſtinately reject it. So that, by their Unbelief, they muſt needs cut themſelves off from the Hopes of Happineſs in the Goſpel-Covenant, as they refuſe to be ſaved by it; and yet have no other Way of appeaſing the Deity, or of rendering him propitious to their manifold Offences.

The foregoing Obſervations may perhaps throw ſome Light upon particular Clauſes in the *Athanaſian* Creed, and make the ſeemingly harſh Doctrine contained in them appear more reconcileable to the Doctrine of the Goſpel, than has generally been imagined. Our Saviour ſays, *He that believeth not, ſhall be damned:* And the *Athanaſian* Creed ſays,

This is the Catholick Faith, which except a Man believe faithfully, he cannot be ſaved. Now all we have to do is, to examine whether the Doctrine St. *Athanaſius* lays down in his Creed, and which he calls the Catholick Faith, be agreeable to the Doctrine of our Saviour laid down in the Goſpel: For if it be agreeable, he ſpeaks no more that what our Saviour gives him Authority to ſpeak. He only ſays, that except a Man believe the Catholick Faith he cannot be ſaved: And our Saviour ſays, *He that believeth not the Goſpel*, which containeth in it the Catholick Faith, *ſhall be damned.* And for my own Part, I muſt own, I never could ſee any ſuch material Difference between the Doctrines contain'd in *Athanaſius*'s Creed, and thoſe in the Goſpel, as to think them any way inconſiſtent with each other. 'Tis true, St. *Athanaſius* gives us a more particular and labour'd Explanation of them than we find in the *New Teſtament*; but yet, as far as I can judge, the *New Teſtament* gives Room for ſuch an Explanation, without putting the leaſt Violence or Force upon it. It were indeed to be wiſh'd, that with Regard to the Doctrine of the Trinity, he had not excluded thoſe from a Poſſibility of being ſaved, who do not exactly think upon it in the ſame Way with him.

him. For though he might think right, and in ſuch a Manner as the Goſpel would juſtify him in; yet, it cannot be denied, but that his Terms are too harſh and ſevere, and ſeem rather to be the Language of a Man heated with Controverſy, in which he was engaged at the Time of his compoſing this Creed, than of a moderate, and charitable Chriſtian. So far, however, I think, all may join in repeating the damnatory Clauſes in this Creed, when they are conſidered only as levelled againſt thoſe, who do not believe the ſeveral Articles of the Chriſtian Faith: For this Application of them will make them quite agreeable to the Doctrine in the Goſpel, particularly to the Doctrine in the Text, and perhaps be a Means of removing thoſe Scruples, which have prevented ſome timorous, well-meaning Chriſtians from joining in the Creed at all.

To conclude, Let us *hold faſt the Profeſſion of our Faith without wavering*; and let us not give in to any novel Schemes, that tend to undermine the great Truths of Chriſtianity. For when once we have renounced theſe, we ſhall find nothing to ſubſtitute in their Room, that can give any Eaſe or Satisfaction to our Minds. And, as a Sign that

we are grounded and eſtabliſhed in the Faith of Chriſt, let us conform our Lives to his ſacred Precepts, and make his Example the Rule of our Conduct. In a Word, let us be careful to adorn his Doctrine in all Things, and not contradict or deny him in our Actions, whom we profeſs in our Words. Thus ſhall we live to him, who died and roſe again for us, and at laſt aſcend to that Place, whither he is gone before to prepare Manſions of eternal Bliſs for his faithful and obedient Servants.

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SERMON VIII.

JOHN iii. 7, 8.

Marvel not that I ſaid unto thee, Ye muſt be born again. The Wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou hearеſt the Sound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

IN the Beginning of this Chapter we find *Nicodemus*, a Phariſee, and one of the *Jewiſh Sanhedrim*, coming to Jeſus by Night, becauſe he would not have it known that he had any Correſpondence with him, and making this ingenuous Confeſſion, *Rabbi, we know that thou art a Teacher come from God: For no Man can do theſe Miracles that thou doeſt, except God be*

with him. Natural Reaſon informed him, that ſuch extraordinary Works could never be performed, but by the Concurrence, at leaſt the Permiſſion of Almighty God; and therefore he reaſonably and juſtly concludes, that the Perſon who performed them muſt be the real *Meſſiah* that was then expected, and of whom the Prophets had ſo clearly foretold; ſince it could never be ſuppoſed, that God would have allowed ſuch Miracles to have been wrought in Confirmation of an Impoſtor. And indeed ſo far *Nicodemus*'s Reaſoning was right: But then, leſt he ſhould flatter himſelf, that the acknowledging Jeſus to be the *Meſſiah*, or *ſent* from God, was all that was required to make him a Chriſtian, our Saviour takes Occaſion further to acquaint him, that, in order to qualify him for that Title, *he muſt be born again. Except*, ſays he, *a Man be born again, he cannot ſee the Kingdom of God.* Upon hearing this, *Nicodemus* was pauſed: He aſks, *How can a Man be born when he is old? Can he enter the ſecond Time into his Mother's Womb and be born?* This *natural Man*, you ſee, could not *receive the Things of the Spirit of God*, neither could he know them, becauſe they *are ſpiritually diſcerned.* He miſtakes our Saviour's Meaning; and inſtead of the ſpiritual Senſe, which our Saviour had in View,

View, attends only to the literal. He could not conceive how a Man of full Years could be born again. This ſeemed impoſſible to him according to the Laws of Nature and Philoſophy. And therefore our Saviour, to ſet him right, and to ſhew that the New Birth he ſpake of, was to be taken in a ſpiritual Senſe, explains himſelf further, by anſwering, *Verily, verily, I ſay unto thee, except a Man be born of Water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.* As if he had ſaid, except a Man be admitted into the Chriſtian Church by Baptiſm, by being baptized into the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt, and thereby engages to conform to the Laws of God and of Chriſt, and to renounce his former, unregenerate Courſe; and in Conſequence of this Baptiſm, except the Influence of the Holy Spirit be ſhed upon his Heart, and be within him a pure Principle of ſpiritual Life, producing a thorough Change of Mind and Manners; he can neither be a Chriſtian here, nor a Saint hereafter. For, as he goes on, *that which is born of the Fleſh is Fleſh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.* That is, the Actions of an unregenerate Man, which proceed not from this New Birth, can only be natu-

ral Actions, ſuch Actions as reſt more in outward Obſervances, than in the inward good Diſpoſitions of the Heart: But the Actions of a ſpiritual Man, of one that is born of Water and of the Spirit, and by that Means made a Proſelyte of Chriſt, will be ſpiritual Actions, ſuch Actions as will ſhew by the Nature and Quality of them, that they take their Riſe from a true ſpiritual Principle.

And that *Nicodemus* might not wonder at what was told him of the Neceſſity of this New Birth, or think there was nothing in it, becauſe he was not ſenſible of the Manner how it was effected, he endeavours to illuſtrate it by a very appoſite Similitude taken from the Wind: *Marvel not that I ſaid unto thee, Ye muſt be born again. The Wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the Sound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth; ſo is every one that is born of the Spirit.* From which Words we may make the following Obſervations.

I. That ſome Things may be known to exiſt, which cannot be known in their Cauſe or Manner of Exiſtence.

II. That which is hid in its Cauſe or Manner of Exiſtence, may be clearly diſcovered in its Conſequences and Effects. And therefore,

III. That the Exiſtence of any Thing is not to be concluded impoſſible, becauſe we cannot find out its Cauſe, or the Manner of its Exiſtence, of its Workings and Motions.

Under which Head, I ſhall ſo far conſider the Similitude in the Text, as may ſerve to illuſtrate the Operations of the Holy Spirit, and evince the Reality of the New Birth. *So is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

I. I am to obſerve, that ſome Things may be known to exiſt, which cannot be known in their Cauſe or Manner of Exiſtence. Indeed there are very few Things in Nature, with which we are made acquainted, by having a thorough Inſight into their inward Make and Conſtitution. Our Knowledge generally plays upon the Surface, upon ſome outward Properties and Perfections, but ſeldom, if ever, reaches to their inward Nature and Eſſence, or to the particular Cauſe which conſtitutes them what they are. And yet though our Knowledge of Things is thus ſhallow and ſuperficial, it is nevertheleſs ſufficient to ſatisfy us, that there are ſuch Things; and our not underſtanding them perfectly, is never urged as a Reaſon againſt their Exiſtence. Who ever doubted that there are Matter and Motion in the Univerſe, though the moſt knowing and learned among

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the Sons of Men, have never been able preciſely to determine the particular Nature of either the one or the other, what are their eſſential Properties, and how they are diverſified, by ſecret-working Methods, into an infinite Variety of Appearances. Nay, thoſe Things which are moſt obvious to us, which we ſee, and feel, and handle, are entirely unknown to us as to their internal Make; and yet that Man would be deemed ſomething worſe than a Sceptic, who ſhould go about to prove, that there were no ſuch Things. The Truth is, though our Knowledge is but very ſhallow and imperfect; yet it is ſufficient to remove all material Scruples: And though it cannot always ſatisfy us as to Matters of mere Curioſity, it will never fail ſatisfying us, if we uſe it properly, as to all neceſſary and uſeful Purpoſes.

And if in the material World we know that Things exiſt, though we do not know the Manner of their Exiſtence, and that our Senſes when corrected by our Judgment, and converſant about Objects within their Reach, are to be truſted; why may it not be preſumed, that we may have an analogous Knowledge with Regard to Things in the ſpiritual World? For Inſtance, though no Man pretends to know the Nature and

Eſſence

Eſſence of the human Soul, how it is diſtinguiſhed from whatever falls under the Notice of our Senſes, what are the Methods of its Operations, and how it is joined in cloſe *Union with the Body*; yet none, on account of their not knowing theſe Particulars, have ever denied that they *have* Souls. And when the Exiſtence of a ſpiritual Subſtance, as the Soul is, comes once to be allowed, though we are little acquainted with its Nature, and Eſſence, and intimate Connection with the Body, this is a conſiderable Step towards the Belief of the Holy Spirit. It at leaſt helps to convince us in general, that there *are* Spirits; and if Spirits of one Kind, why not of another? Beſides, there is no more Difficulty in conceiving how the Spirit of God may influence and direct the Soul of Man, than how the Soul of Man can be united with, and act upon his Body. For that Spirit ſhould act upon Spirit, is not harder to conceive, than that Spirit ſhould act upon Matter, as is certainly the Caſe with regard to the Soul and Body of Man; and if we know a Thing to be Fact which we cannot account for, ſuch Knowledge cannot but reconcile us to the Belief of that which lies equally upon a Level with

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our natural Notions of Things, and ſeems equally ſuited to our narrow Capacities.

But, to explain the Matter a little more fully, we will proceed to ſhew,

II. That what is hid in its Cauſe or Manner of Exiſtence, may be clearly diſcovered in its Conſequences and Effects. For there can be no Effect without a Cauſe; ſo that when we ſee Effects produced, we immediately conclude that there muſt be ſome Cauſe that produced them. And indeed it is in this manner that we come at the Knowledge of a great many Things, both in the natural and ſpiritual World, which otherwiſe we ſhould have been utterly unacquainted with. We ſhould never have known that Trees and Plants had been endued with a Power of Vegetation; or, in the Language of Philoſophers, with a vegetative Soul, had it not ſhewn itſelf in Leaves and Fruit. For as to its Exiſtence and the Manner of its Working, had not theſe Effects appeared, we ſhould have been entirely ignorant. Nor ſhould we have known that the Sun was a luminous Body, and that its eſſential Property was Heat, were we not ſenſible that from it proceeded the Rays of Light, and that by its kindly Warmth both the animal and vegetable Creation were cheriſh'd and refreſh'd.

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It is from ſeeing and obſerving ſuch Effects as theſe in the Univerſe, that we are led to the Knowledge of moſt Things in it, and not from any intimate Acquaintance with their Nature and Eſſence.

The ſame likewiſe holds with regard to the ſpiritual World: We are confeſſedly ignorant of the Nature of Spirits; and yet we know from what we feel within ourſelves, that there muſt be ſomething diſtinct from Matter: We cannot account for the Powers of Reaſon, Judgment, and Imagination, of which we find ourſelves poſſeſs'd, without ſuppoſing them to be the Effects of ſomething ſpiritual within us. For let Matter be thrown into never ſo great a Variety of Forms, it will never be able to produce any thing like Thought: It will ſtill remain ſtupid and unconſcious, till it is animated and informed by what we call Spirit. We know therefore that we are endued with ſuch a Spirit or Soul, though we are entirely ignorant of its Nature; becauſe we find ourſelves poſſeſs'd of ſuch Faculties as can only belong to Spirit, and can never be aſcribed to Matter and Motion. In Dreams eſpecially, when the Body lies dormant, and all the Inlets of Senſe are ſhut up, we find the Soul exerting itſelf with ſurprizing Quickneſs and Agility: It

traverſes

traverſes in an Inſtant the vaſt Boundaries of the Creation; connects the moſt diſtant Places and Times, and even forms to itſelf Ideas of Things, which never could be borrowed immediately from material Objects. And if it is capable of performing ſuch Wonders, when united to the Body, how aſtoniſhing muſt be its Operations, when entirely diſengaged from it! When it is diſentangled from this Load of corruptible Matter, and releaſed from its earthly Confinement, it will then reſume its native Energy of acting, and with an amazing Rapidity of Motion, travel over the Immenſity of God's Creation. Thus much we may know of the Soul, and its Operations, from what we feel within ourſelves, from thoſe particular reflex Acts of the Mind, which are only the Effects of a ſpiritual Subſtance, and can never belong to Matter.

In a Word, what we know both of the material and ſpiritual World, we know generally by Effects, and not by any particular Inſight into the internal Make and Conſtitution of Things: And it is by ſuch Knowledge from Effects, that their real Exiſtence is aſcertained to us. And therefore we may proceed to ſhew,

III. That

III. That the Exiſtence of any Thing is not to be concluded impoſſible, becauſe we cannot find out its Cauſe or the Manner of its Exiſtence, of its Workings and Motions. Under which Head, I ſhall ſo far conſider the Similitude in the Text, as may ſerve to illuſtrate the Operations of the Holy Spirit, and evince the Reality of the New-Birth. *Marvel not, that I ſaid unto thee, Ye muſt be born again. The Wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou hearеſt the Sound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; ſo is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

It is enough to ſatisfy us that Things exiſt, if we have as much Certainty of their Exiſtence, as the Nature of the Things themſelves, or the Narrowneſs of our Underſtandings will admit of; and to deſire more, would be very abſurd and unreaſonable. We do not pretend, and indeed Experience would ſoon convince us ſuch a Pretenſion was vain, to know all the Properties of thoſe Things, which we know to exiſt in the material World. A Flower, a Plant, a Shrub, nay even the very Duſt that we tread upon, have numberleſs Qualities in them, which lay quite out of the Reach of human Penetration; and yet our Ignorance with Regard to theſe Qualities, is never made a Reaſon why we ſhould deny

the Existence of the Things themselves. But though in the natural World, our Ignorance of the Qualities of Things is never brought as a Reason against their Existence; yet, in the spiritual World, it is frequently considered as one. Infidels and Scepticks, because they do not know the Nature of Spirits, have often been inclined to doubt whether there were such Things at all, though what they find within themselves, those Operations of their own Souls, which cannot be accounted for upon any natural Principles, might serve them, one should think, for ten thousand Arguments! What however affords most Matter for cavilling, and which so much perplexed *Nicodemus*, is, the Reality of the New Birth, or those Operations upon the Soul of Man, which are called the Operations of the Holy Spirit. Now that there are such Operations, we have as much Certainty, as we have of the Existence of natural Things from their Effects, though we are ignorant of the Cause and Manner of their Existence. And this is illustrated by the apposite Similitude in the Text. *The Wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the Sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* Though we cannot tell the Reason why

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the Wind bloweth in this or that particular Place, what is its Nature and Origin, or whence it cometh or whither it goeth; yet as we hear the Sound thereof, and perceive the Effects it produces, we cannot in the leaſt doubt but that there *is* ſuch a Thing. In like Manner, though we cannot tell the Nature of the Motions of the Holy Spirit, the Manner of its Operations, nor how it influences and governs the Hearts, and of Courſe the Actions of Men, yet as we feel at particular Times an Inclination to do good, which by Reaſon of our original Corruption, is contrary to the general Byaſs of our Minds; we may ſafely attribute all Inclinations of this Kind to the Holy Spirit of God. For the Apoſtle tells us, that in our unregenerate State, we are not able of ourſelves to think or do any Thing as of ourſelves, but teaches us to aſcribe all our Sufficiency to God: And alſo he acknowledges, that *in him*, that is, *in his Fleſh, dwelleth no good Thing*. If therefore in us, that is, in our Fleſh, dwelleth no good Thing, if by reaſon of our original Depravity occaſioned by the Fall, we are not able, nor even willing of ourſelves, to think or act as we ought, we cannot but aſcribe all holy Deſires, all good Counſels, and all juſt Works, to the godly Motions and Suggeſtions

of the Divine Spirit. Accordingly the Scriptures of the *New Teſtament* always conſider the Grace of God as the efficacious Cauſe of all thoſe Divine, moral, and Chriſtian Virtues, which we at any Time practiſe. *The Fruit of the Spirit*, ſays the Apoſtle, *is Love, Joy, Peace, Long-ſuffering, Gentleneſs, Goodneſs, Faith, Meekneſs, Temperance.* And again; *For the Fruit of the Spirit is in all Goodneſs, and Righteouſneſs, and Truth.* And though we are not now ſo ſenſible of its Effects as the firſt Chriſtians were, though it does not now come upon us like a *ruſhing mighty Wind*, as it did on the Apoſtles on the Day of Pentecoſt, nor enable us to ſpeak with other Tongues, yet it ſtill ſpeaks to the Hearts and Conſciences of all true Believers in a ſtill, ſmall Voice, animating and encouraging them in the Ways of Virtue and Godlineſs, and diſſuading them by its gentle Warnings and Admonitions from continuing in a wicked and impenitent Courſe.

We all, I believe, are ſenſible at particular Times, of having good Thoughts infuſed *inſtantaneouſly*, as it were, into our Hearts, of being ſtrangely and unexpectedly prompted to do good, when but the Moment before the whole Bent of our Inclinations was entirely ſet upon doing evil. There is no Man that

cannot

cannot recollect ſeveral Inſtances of ſuch Changes in the Temper and Diſpoſitions of his Mind, which have given a new Turn to his Reſolutions, and have made him act contrary oftentimes to a ſettled wicked Determination. Theſe we call the ordinary Workings of the Spirit; becauſe we can aſſign no other adequate Cauſe of them, and find nothing in the mere natural Man that is capable of producing ſuch ſurprizing Effects. And though we cannot tell whence theſe Workings come, or whither they go; yet as we hear the Sound of them, as we are ſenſible of ſecret Whiſperings and Motions within us, which are better felt than expreſſed, we cannot at all doubt but that they are the Effects of the Spirit, the ſecret Whiſperings and Motions of the Holy Ghoſt.

'Tis true, extraordinary Inſpirations are not now vouchſafed; for after the Eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity in the World, they became ſuperfluous. But then though extraordinary Inſpirations ceaſed, as ſoon as the End for which they were intended, was anſwered; yet ordinary ones are ſtill continued, and will be continued to the End of the World. For we have our Saviour's Promiſe for it, That he will be with us always, even unto the

End of the World: And there is no other Way, by which he can be with us, but by his Spirit.

Whenever therefore, we find ourſelves diſpoſed to the Performance of any virtuous Action, to Acts of Piety and Devotion towards our Creator, or of Charity and Humanity towards our Fellow-Creatures, we may ſafely aſcribe ſuch good Diſpoſitions to the gracious Influences of the Divine Spirit. Theſe are Effects which plainly point out their Cauſe, and by the Nature of them ſhew the Purity of the Source from whence they proceed. Be it then our Care, not to reſiſt its godly Motions, but to cloſe in with its kind Invitations, and liſten to its friendly Admonitions: For though it perſuades, it does not force us, to be good. It leaves us ſtill at Liberty to act as we pleaſe, and lays no Reſtraint upon us, but what is very conſiſtent with the Freedom of moral Agents. Let us however remember, that the Spirit of God will not always ſtrive with us, that if we ſtill obſtinately perſiſt to counteract his Suggeſtions, he will at laſt be provoked to forſake us, and leave us to lean on the bruiſed Reed of our own Strength. It is only ſuch as ſecond, by their own Endeavours, the gracious

cious Assistances of the Divine Spirit, that will always find a Helper in Time of Need; For such he will guide, direct, and comfort, while they continue here, and will hereafter receive them into Mansions of eternal Bliss and Happiness, through the Merits and Mediation of Christ our Saviour.

SERMON IX.

1 Cor. i. part of the 21ſt verſe.

-----The World by Wiſdom knew not God.

THIS is a full and clear Propoſition of itſelf, which ſuffers not the leaſt Alteration in the Senſe, either from what goes before, or from what follows after. And the Senſe of it plainly is, that Men never did, or, which is the ſame Thing, never cou'd find out the Being of God, by the Light of Reaſon and Nature only; but that all the Knowledge they ever had of him, was derived to them from ſome foreign Aſſiſtance, and not from their own Philoſophical Reſearches.

If uninſpired Authorities were to determine our Opinion in the preſent Caſe, we ſhou'd be oblig'd to allow, that the Apoſtle has here

here taken the wrong Side of the Question. For in ſeveral Treatiſes upon natural Religion, written by Men of diſtinguiſhed Name, it is all along taken for granted, that mere unaſſiſted Reaſon, duly exerciſed, is able to trace out the firſt and leading Principles of Religion, and from thence to form a compleat Scheme of moral Duties. Indeed, were the Writings of theſe Men upon Morals to be a Specimen to us of what all Men cou'd do upon the ſame Subject, we ought certainly to acquieſce in what they have told us: But when we conſider, that the Wiſeſt among the Heathens, of equally good Parts and improved Underſtandings with themſelves, fell infinitely ſhort of them in this Particular, we cannot help thinking, but that they have had Advantages, which theſe Heathens wanted, and which alone give them ſo much the Superiority in point of religious Knowledge.

What has ſerved to confirm the Writers, we have been ſpeaking of, and other Chriſtians in the Sufficiency of our natural Faculties for the Diſcovery of divine Matters, is this, that there are ſome Paſſages in St. *Paul*'s Epiſtles, which ſeem to intimate, that by making a due Uſe of our Reaſon in contemplating the Works of the Creation, we may

be able to find out clearly and diſtinctly the Being and Attributes of God. Yet nevertheleſs, I am perſuaded, whoever comes to examine theſe Paſſages without Prejudice, will ſoon be convinced, that they are capable of a more eaſy and natural Interpretation; and that the Works of the Creation, therein referred to, are referred to, not as conveying Proofs, but only as giving the moſt illuſtrious Diſplays and cleareſt Atteſtations of the eternal Power and Godhead; for theſe Truths themſelves are always ſuppoſed in the Scriptures to be in ſome Degree previouſly known.

But the greateſt Miſchief of all, is, that the extravagant Encomiums moſt of our Divines have paſs'd upon natural Religion, and the ſurprizing Things they have aſcribed to Reaſon independent of Revelation, have given ſuch Advantage to Deiſts and Infidels, that they have argued with them upon their own Principles againſt that very Revelation: For, ſay they, if unaſſiſted Reaſon can do ſo much, can diſcover to us, as you yourſelves own, the Being of God, and other Duties reſulting from the Knowledge of him, ſo as that we are furniſhed from thence with a full and conſiſtent Rule of Action; what Neceſſity is there for that Revelation you ſo earneſtly

earneſtly contend for. You have almoſt rendered it uſeleſs by your own Conceſſions, why then will you labour ſo much to preſerve a Thing of little or no Value? And though this Argument is carried much farther than it can poſſibly bear, ſince a Revelation deſigned to communicate a Religion for the Uſe of Sinners, may reaſonably be ſuppoſed to contain many Things abſolutely neceſſary, as the Chriſtian Revelation certainly does, beſides a mere Syſtem of moral Duties; yet, I am afraid, it is an Argument, which will prove more than our Advocates for natural Religion will eaſily be able to anſwer.

In order therefore to obviate any Objections againſt Revelation, drawn from the unguarded Conceſſions of Chriſtians in Favour of natural Religion, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

That what Men call natural Religion, was in all Probability originally derived from Revelation, and was not the Diſcovery of Reaſon.

If this can in any Sort be made appear, thoſe Infidels, who reject all Kinds of Revelation, muſt be convinced that they have hitherto gone upon wrong Principles: For they have all along taken it for granted, that natural Religion is entirely independent of Re-

Revelation, and no Way aſſiſted by it. Whereas if there are any Grounds to imagine, that Natural Religion is derived from, and owes its very Being to Revealed, they will find themſelves indebted to that, which they have been ſo induſtrious in decrying, and muſt own that Revelation is not ſo unneceſſary a Thing as they would repreſent it, when they ſee that it gave Birth to their much beloved natural Religion: For ſurely if they love and admire the Offſpring, they cannot hate and deſpiſe the Parent, from whence it ſprung.

And that Revelation was the Parent of natural Religion, can hardly, I think, be doubted by any one, who conſiders, that in Proportion as Revelation has been found or communicated any where, there only in proportion has natural Religion obtained; and, on the other Hand, in Proportion as *that* hath been wanting, or but partially communicated, a Mixture of Superſtition or of falſe Religion in Proportion hath prevailed. In the firſt Ages of the World, when Mankind were favoured with frequent Revelations of the divine Will, they entertained very rational Notions of the Deity, and of the Duties which they owed to him and their Fellow Creatures: The Unity of the ſupreme Being, and his univerſal Providence, were then

Truths

Truths which were univerſally received and believed. But in Proceſs of Time, when either theſe Revelations were diſcontinued, or the Traditions which conveyed them obſcured; or what probably is oftentimes the Caſe, when through Inattention they were not ſufficiently regarded, it was then plainly obſervable, what a Train of ſuperſtitious and idolatrous Rites ſucceeded, and how in Proportion as Men departed from that Simplicity of Religion, which Revelation ſuggeſted to them, they gradually degenerated into all the Abſurdities of falſe Worſhip. For the Truth of this, we need only look back into any two particular Periods of Time, when Men were poſſeſs'd of divine Revelation, and when they were in a great Meaſure without it; and we ſhall plainly perceive a very viſible Difference with Regard to natural Religion. Who can ſay, that Men had the ſame Rational Notions of the Deity, or the ſame juſt Senſe of natural Religion, in the Ages before *Abraham*, when they had little or no Light from Revelation; as in the Days of *Moſes*, and the Prophets that ſucceeded him, when they were particularly favoured with it: There was as much Difference in theſe two Ages with Regard to Religion, as there is a Difference betwixt true

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Religion and the groſſeſt Idolatry. For in the Days of *Moſes* and the Prophets, Men acknowledged the Unity of the ſupreme Being, and pay'd him a reaſonable Service: Whereas in the Days before *Abraham*, a general Corruption of Manners and of Worſhip prevailed, and Men were ſo far from having any juſt Senſe of Religion, that they had hardly any Senſe of common Humanity. The Truth is, in the ſame Degree that Revelation is communicated, in the ſame Degree will it ever be found that natural Religion gains Ground; and, on the other Hand, in the ſame Degree that the Light of Revelation is either witheld or obſcured, in the ſame Degree will natural Religion be either entirely loſt in Errot and Ignorance, or but faintly diſcerned.

And if it thus appears that natural Religion cannot ſubſiſt without Revelation, but that the Senſe of it wears out and diminiſhes, in Proportion as the Light of Revelation grows faint and obſcure; we have all the Reaſon in the World to believe, that natural Religion is originally derived from, and owes its very Being to, Revelation.

If it be ſaid, that the Principles and Duties of natural Religion are diſcoverable by Reaſon alone without Revelation, how comes

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it to paſs, that they never were diſcovered by it. For we always find, that theſe Principles or Duties were more or leſs clear, according as Mankind were more or leſs enlightened by Divine Revelation. Whereas if Reaſon alone was able to diſcover them, it would be equally able to diſcover them without a Revelation as with it, and the Dimneſs or Clearneſs of that Revelation, would not at all influence ſuch Diſcoveries, would neither promote nor hinder them. There would then be no Difference as to the State of natural Religion, whatever became of Divine Revelation; inaſmuch as Reaſon, which it depended upon, would in general continue the ſame, and conſequently would ſee as clearly the Principles and Duties of it at one Time as another. But as there never was a Time when Reaſon could diſcover them of itſelf, and as Revelation has ever been found to bring them firſt to Light, and to diſplay them to the World; this amounts to a convincing Proof, that all our Knowledge of natural Religion is originally derived from Revelation. For what poſſible Cauſe can be aſſigned, why natural Religion, and the firſt Principles of it, even the Unity of God, ſhould only obtain under the Light of Revelation, except it be that the Light of Revela-

tion

tion alone is able to diſcover them? For if the Light of Reaſon cou'd diſcover them, it is very ſurprizing that they never were diſcovered by it in the Abſence of Revelation. And we have ſeen above that the Principles and Duties of what is called natural Religion appeared always either more clear or obſcure in Proportion, as Revelation was either more faintly or more fully communicated.

But it may poſſibly be further urged, that the Clearneſs or Dimneſs of natural Religion at certain particular Times, may be owing to ſome other Cauſes beſides Revelation, and why then will we attribute it to that? I anſwer, becauſe no other Cauſe can poſſibly account for the thing: For if natural Religion is ever obſerved to flouriſh moſt under Revelation, and if *it* is obſerved to decline and degenerate into Superſtition, in the ſame Proportion as Revelation is obſerved to grow obſcure or to be withdrawn, we have the ſtrongeſt Preſumption that can be, that natural Religion is upheld and ſupported by Revelation, and conſequently owes its Being to it. For what has conſtantly and invariably in all Times and Places produced the ſame Effects, muſt neceſſarily be look'd upon as the Cauſe of theſe Effects, and no

other Cauſe of them can reaſonably be aſſigned.

Perhaps the ancient Sages among the *Greeks* and *Romans*, who entertained juſt Notions of natural Religion, as appears from their Writings, but yet who have generally been reckoned deſtitute of divine Revelation, may ſeem to overthrow what we have hitherto been endeavouring to eſtabliſh: But they only *ſeem* to overthrow it; for in Reality they ſerve, as will be evident from an Examination of the Matter, to ſtrengthen and confirm it. That both the *Greek* and *Roman* Philoſophers were in Poſſeſſion of ſeveral very juſt Notions of natural Religion is a Truth which cannot be denied; but how they came by them is the Queſtion to be determined. Now this will not be long in determining, if we conſider, that the wiſe Men of both Countries travelled in queſt of Knowledge into foreign Parts: The *Greeks* travelled into *Egypt*, *Phœnicia*, and it is probable even into *Judæa* itſelf: For St. *Luke* informs us in the *Acts of the Apoſtles*, that *there were abiding in* Jeruſalem, *at the Seaſon of Pentecoſt, devout Men out of every Nation under Heaven. There* they enriched their Minds with religious Truths either immediately

mediately by having Recourſe to the Writings of *Moſes* himſelf, or by converſing either with thoſe who had ſeen them, or who had them delivered to them by Tradition; and from thence they returned Home laden with the Treaſures of divine Knowledge, which they liberally communicated to their Countrymen. All the Knowledge they had before of divine Matters was very ſhallow and imperfect; though even that little, it is probable, was conveyed to them through the Channel of Tradition very much corrupted, and was originally derived from divine Revelation.

And as for the *Romans*, the beſt Notions they had of natural Religion were either fetch'd immediately from the ſame divine Fountain, or borrowed from the *Greeks*, to whom they were greatly indebted not only for enriching their Language, and rendering it more elegant and copious, but alſo for improving their Philoſophy, and giving them more juſt and exalted Conceptions of the ſupreme Being.

From hence it is eaſily ſeen, whence both the *Greeks* and *Romans* had their Knowledge of divine Matters, without having Recourſe to the Aſſiſtance of Reaſon. For it is plain the firſt Principles of it were not their own Diſcoveries; nay, both *Plato* and

Tully confeſs as much, but were either immediately derived from Revelation or elſe conveyed by the Channel of Tradition. They came originally from the *Jews* to the *Greeks*, and from the *Greeks* to the *Romans*; or perhaps the *Romans* had them from the Fountain-head; for among that Concourſe of devout Men from every Nation under Heaven, which were met together at *Jeruſalem* to celebrate the Feaſt of Pentecoſt, St. *Luke* not only particularly mentions the Inhabitants of *Pontus* and *Aſia*, which were *Greeks*, but alſo Strangers of *Rome*.

It is indeed certain, that the popular Religion of both *Greece* and *Rome* was made up of very abſurd and ſuperſtitious Rites; but yet it is equally certain from the Nature of them, that their Original was Divine, however they might be corrupted in the Conveyance: For their believing in a Multitude of falſe Gods, many of whom were Patrons of Vice and Immorality, and conſequently their performing to them a falſe and erroneous Worſhip, was an Argument of a true God and a true Worſhip: For whatever is Falſe in Religion, ariſes generally from miſtaking ſomething to be True, which is miſapprehended in Religion.

And

And as to that more refined Religion which obtained among the Philoſophers and wiſe Men of both theſe Countries, it cannot be doubted, but that the firſt Principles of it were derived from Revelation in ſome ſuch Manner as we have deſcribed. For there is not the leaſt Shadow of Reaſon to imagine, that theſe Principles were their own Diſcoveries, or that they came to the Knowledge of them by the Light of Reaſon. They found them ready diſcovered to their Hands, and when they were diſcovered, they then reaſoned upon them, and deduced ſuch Truths from them as formed that Scheme of natural Religion, which we find in their Writings. Being put in the Poſſeſſion of ſome leading Principles through traditionary Revelation, they by Study and unwearied Application, raiſed their Conceptions above the common Notions of the Vulgar; diſtinguiſhed betwixt Superſtition and Religion, and became, as it were, Lights to the World in theſe Ages of Darkneſs and Ignorance: And while the Bulk of Mankind were carried away into Idolatry and falſe Worſhip, for want of attending to thoſe faint Rays of divine Light, which with Difficulty penetrated through the thick Gloom of Error and Superſtition; they by a due Exerciſe

of their Reaſon, and by making ſuch great Truths as Revelation had but partially furniſhed them with, the Guide of their Enquiries, gave a ſurprizing Specimen to the World of what human Reaſon cou'd do, when exerted to the utmoſt. They thereby vanquiſhed thoſe inveterate Enemies to Truth, the Prejudices of Education; oppoſed the violent Sallies of Bigotry and falſe Worſhip, and one of them bravely aſſerted the Unity of the Deity, againſt the eſtabliſhed and authorized Belief of a Plurality of Gods. And yet all theſe gallant Efforts of Reaſon in Favour of natural Religion, were owing to the Succours, though weak, which it received from Revelation.

The Truth is, Reaſon of itſelf never has been nor ever will be able originally to make Diſcoveries in religious Matters: It can only ſee and judge of the Reaſonableneſs of divine Truths, when diſcovered, but nothing farther: And if at any time it has been obſerved to go greater Lengths, that muſt be attributed to the Aſſiſtance of Revelation.

I believe we may appeal to thoſe very Perſons themſelves, who decry Revelation, whether they ſincerely think that they would have had the ſame juſt Notions of natural Religion without Revelation as with it; and whether,

if

if it had been their Fortune to have been born and brought up in ſome of thoſe dark Corners of the Earth, where the Light of the Goſpel never ſhone, they would have had the ſame Knowledge of divine Matters, as they have at preſent? To evade the Force of ſuch an Appeal, they may poſſibly ſay, that their Reaſon is more improved than that of thoſe ignorant People; and conſequently that they are better qualified on that Account for religious Enquiries. But whence is it that their Reaſon is more improved and enlightened? It cannot be, that they have quicker or better natural Parts; for, as to theſe, Men have generally been reckoned to be much upon a Level; and I dare ſay, that our modern Infidels, had they nothing to truſt to beſides, would be as deficient in Point of religious Knowledge, as the moſt ignorant among the poor *Indians*. So that if they would ſpeak out freely and ingenuouſly, they muſt be obliged to own, that it is that very Revelation, which they ungratefully vilify, that gives them the Superiority in Knowledge over thoſe who in a great Meaſure want it, and not their Reaſon; ſince all have nearly a pretty equal Share of that; whereas we ſee what a wide Difference there is, with regard to the Principles of natural Religion; betwixt thoſe

who have that only, and thoſe who enjoy the Advantage of Revelation along with it.

From all which it does, I think, appear, as I attempted to ſhew, That what Men call natural Religion, was, in all Probability, originally derived from Revelation, and was not the Diſcovery of Reaſon: And therefore, that it is very unfair, and even prepoſterous, to make natural Religion a Pretence for running down Revelation, when it owes its very Being to it, and is ſtill ſupported by it. I ſhall now make two or three Inferences from what has been ſaid. And,

1ſt. If natural Religion is ſo much beholden to Revelation, as that in all Probability it cannot ſubſiſt without it, thoſe Perſons who are Advocates for natural Religion, cannot but in Juſtice acknowledge themſelves obliged to Revelation; ſince to it they are originally indebted for their Knowledge of it. For without Revelation, they muſt have been contented with ſuch Truths as Reaſon dictated to them; and we find that Reaſon, when left to itſelf, could never ſo much as make out the firſt Principles of natural Religion. Let them look into thoſe Countries, where the Light of Revelation is either entirely excluded, or but partially communicated, and there they will ſee what wild Work

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Men make of Religion, and how they run into all the Abſurdities and Extravagancies of Superſtition, notwithſtanding they are poſſeſſed of the Light of Reaſon. And it is not to be queſtioned, but that our modern Infidels, who talk ſo learnedly of the Attributes of the Deity, of the eternal Fitneſs of Things, and of natural Obligation to Duty ariſing from them, would fall into the ſame Errors, had they happened to have been placed in the ſame diſadvantageous Circumſtances. If they have acquired all this Knowledge by the Light of Reaſon, how comes it to paſs, that thoſe who enjoy the ſame Light, do not arrive to the ſame Degree of Knowledge? It can no otherwiſe be accounted for, than that they want that additional Light, the Light of Revelation, which our modern Freethinkers are in Poſſeſſion of, and not that they are inferior to them in natural Parts and Underſtanding.

Revelation therefore may juſtly expect to have ſome Share of Regard from thoſe Men, inaſmuch as it has given them that extraordinary Inſight into natural Religion, upon which they ſo much value themſelves, however they may attribute it to Reaſon or any other Cauſe. But,

2*dly*,

2dly, As we are all indebted to Revelation for the Knowledge we have of the Principles and Duties of natural Religion, and alſo for diſcovering to us other Truths, which are ſuited to influence and regulate our Behaviour; we cannot do leſs than expreſs a grateful Senſe of the Benefits we enjoy by it, and accordingly treat it with the higheſt Reverence and Reſpect. View the Inhabitants of this Land, once a barbarous and uncivilized Race of Men; their Religion, Superſtition; and their Worſhip, Idolatry: And view the ſurprizing Change Revelation has made among them; Revelation ſhining, Ignorance diſpelled, their falſe Gods and falſe Worſhip entirely baniſhed, and Religion by Degrees appearing in its preſent Purity and Perfection. Revelation firſt reſcued us from the groſs Darkneſs of Paganiſm, and afterwards from the no leſs dangerous Darkneſs of Popery, and inſtructed us to worſhip God in that Beauty of Holineſs, which will render all our Services acceptable to him. And how happy then ought we to think ourſelves in the Poſſeſſion of this Revelation! For had it not been for this Revelation, we ſhould ſtill have continued in the ſame State of Ignorance and Darkneſs, ſtill have been *Strangers from the Covenant of Promiſe, having*

ing no Hope, and without God in the World. However we are to remember,

3*dly and laſtly*, That the Knowledge which we have of God and our Duty through Revelation, will only aggravate our Guilt, and increaſe our Condemnation, if it does not make us better and more truly religious: For in vain are we inſtructed in every Thing that pertaineth to Life and Godlineſs, ſo long as our Lives are as wicked as if we wanted Inſtruction. We are apt to pity thoſe poor unenlightened Heathens, who ſit in the Darkneſs of Paganiſm, and are without any juſt Senſe of God and Religion. Weep not for them, but weep for yourſelves and your Children, who have turned your Light into Darkneſs by your ungodly, unbecoming Behaviour. Their Ignorance will be their Excuſe, at leaſt mitigate the Heinouſneſs of their Crimes. Whereas your Knowledge, by your ſhameful Abuſe of it, will prove a very aggravating Circumſtance, when you come to make up your final Accounts. For every Man ſhall be judged according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not; and *to whomſoever much is given, of him much ſhall be required.* And therefore, to conclude, Let not that Revelation, which came from Heaven on Purpoſe to inſtruct you

you in the Way thither, be perverted into the Means of bringing upon yourſelves Miſery and Deſtruction; for Miſery and Deſtruction it will certainly bring upon you, if you do not live anſwerably to the Truths it delivers to you. But let the great Advantages you enjoy above thoſe who are deſtitute of it, be a powerful Motive with you to be as virtuous and good, as Revelation has made you knowing. For remember that you had better be ignorant miſtaken Heathens, than knowingly wicked and abandon'd Chriſtians; and that nothing will give you ſuch ſtinging Reflections at the Hour of Death as the Conſideration, that you knew ſo well the Way that leadeth to Happineſs, but took ſo little Care to walk in it.

SER-

SERMON X.

MARK IX. 40.

For he that is not againſt us, is on our Part.

THIS Remark of our Saviour will be beſt underſtood by attending to the Tranſaction, which gave immediate Riſe to it. And the Tranſaction was briefly as follows: *John*, a Diſciple of our Saviour, had accidentally ſeen a Man caſting out Devils in Chriſt's Name, who was an utter Stranger to him, and who had never been received into the Number of his Followers. Upon which the good well-meaning Diſciple was greatly diſguſted, and being mightily zealous for the Honour of his Maſter, which he imagin'd thereby to be nearly affected, poſitively charges this Stranger to deſiſt for the future from all miraculous Attempts; and

and being exceedingly pleaſed with what he had done, comes directly to Jeſus and relates the whole Affair to him, expecting no doubt to have been greatly commended for his zealous Officiouſneſs. But herein, we find, he was very much miſtaken; for our Saviour rather reproves than encourages his Zeal, by telling him, *to forbid him not*; ſubjoining this as a Reaſon for it, *that there is no Man that ſhall do a Miracle in my Name, that can lightly ſpeak evil of me.* He was very ſenſible that a Perſon who made uſe of his Name in performing Miracles, cou'd not really be his Enemy, or throw any Diſhonour upon him, notwithſtanding that Perſon might not think fit to accompany with him: And then he adds the Remark in the Text; *For he that is not againſt us, is on our Part.* That is, thoſe who are not engaged in depreciating and injuring our Cauſe, cannot but be our Friends and Well-wiſhers; and though this Man you find fault with does not aſſociate with us; yet as he works Miracles in my Name, we may charitably ſuppoſe him to be on our Side, and to have nevertheleſs our Intereſt at Heart.

This is the immediate Meaning and Purport of the Text. But I ſhall take Occaſion to conſider it in a more diſtant and extenſive View,

View, and ſhall endeavour to make it appear notwithſtanding the idle Objections of Infidels and Freethinkers, that thoſe who are no Enemies to the Morality of Chriſt's Goſpel, can be no Enemies to the Goſpel itſelf; and that none can be Well-wiſhers to Morality, whatever they may pretend to, who are not at the ſame Time Well-wiſhers to the Chriſtian Revelation.

I. Then I am to make it appear, that thoſe who are no Enemies to the Morality of Chriſt's Goſpel, can be no Enemies to the Goſpel itſelf: *For he that is not againſt us in this Reſpect, is on our Part.* The Goſpel is the very Perfection and higheſt Improvement of the moral Law: It ſets what was before obſcure in it, in the moſt clear and engaging Light, and alſo diſcovers Truths relating thereto of the utmoſt Importance, to the Knowledge of which unaſſiſted Reaſon of itſelf cou'd never have attained. So that the Man who ſincerely loves Morality, and who heartily deſires to perform the Duties of it, cannot but be a Lover of that Inſtitution, which ſo much heightens and improves it, as the Goſpel does, ſo much illuſtrates and enforces it.

But to be more particular upon this Head: Every thinking Perſon will allow, that

a right Knowledge of God, of his Nature and Perfections, is the only true Foundation whereon Morality can be built. For without this Knowledge we ſhou'd be perpetually miſtaken with regard to the Practice of our Duty; becauſe Duty implies a Performance of ſuch and ſuch Things as are agreeable to the Superior, to whom we owe them; which Things cannot be performed aright, unleſs we know that Superior, are acquainted with his Nature and Attributes, and the ſeveral Relations he ſtands in to us. And yet it is the Goſpel alone that gives us a juſt Inſight into the Nature and Perfections of God, our Superior, to whom our Duty, as moral Agents, is to be pay'd, and conſequently that can aſcertain to us the unerring Standard of Morality, or, in other Words, can direct us in the proper Diſcharge of our Duty. Accordingly, we find that thoſe, who liv'd in the Times of Gentile Ignorance, and who had no other Notions of God but what mere, unaſſiſted Reaſon had furniſhed them with, were far from being able to draw up for their own Uſe a complete Scheme of moral Duties, which might upon all Occaſions be to them a ſufficient Rule of Action. As their Notions of God were falſe and erroneous, ſo were they of courſe miſtaken about the

the Duties which they owed him, and alſo in their Manner of performing them. For wrong and imperfect Notions of God muſt neceſſarily give a falſe Byaſs to our moral Behaviour, muſt make us act contrary to thoſe moral Fitneſſes of Things, which proceed from the Will of God, and muſt move us to perform an abſurd kind of Service to him, inaſmuch as we ſhall imagine him to be, what he is not; which is the real Cauſe of all that Superſtition and erroneous Worſhip, that have ever obtained in the World.

Every honeſt, good Man then, who wou'd chooſe to promote the Intereſt of Morality, and who is willing to act up to the Rules of it, will undoubtedly be a Friend and Admirer of the Goſpel: For that alone gives him a juſt Repreſentation of the moral Attributes of God; and theſe muſt ever be the Standard, whereby to regulate our moral Behaviour.

Again, a Lover of Morality will be a Lover of the Goſpel, as that improves upon the moral Virtues, and raiſes them to a much more exalted and ſublimated Pitch, than any Schemes among the ancient Philoſophers cou'd ever attain to. They all of them too much countenanc'd and indulg'd their ſelfiſh Paſſions, their Pride and Ambition, their

Love of Applauſe and Deſire of Revenge. And at the ſame Time too much ſtraiten'd and confined their ſocial Affections, perverted their natural Inclinations, and either reſtrained them in too narrow a Compaſs, or gave an extravagant and unlimited Looſe to them: Both which Courſes were equally productive of miſchievous Conſequences. All their Treatiſes of Ethicks ſeem to be defective in theſe ſeveral Particulars. Vain-glory and an immoderate Deſire of Fame was what the great *Tully* encouraged both by his Writings and Practice: And as for a Deſire of Revenge, that was eſteemed by them more noble and glorious than a meek and forgiving Temper. For it was agreed upon by the Generality of the Philoſophers, that there was more Generoſity and Greatneſs of Soul in revenging an Injury, than in forgiving it. The ſame Narrowneſs of thinking appears in the Management and Conduct of their ſocial Affections: Theſe were not to extend further than their Friends and Relations, or at moſt to the particular Community of which they were Members. As for all others they excluded them from having any Share in their kind and good Offices. And inſtead of regulating the Paſſions, and keeping them in due Subjection to Reaſon, the *Stoicks* were for

for utterly extirpating them, and endeavour'd to bring themſelves to a perfect Indifference as to Pleaſure and Pain. The *Epicureans* and *Cynicks* run into the other Extreme: The one plac'd their chief Happineſs in ſenſual Enjoyments, and gave a full and unlimited Scope to their bodily Appetites: The other allowed themſelves in the ſame or greater Indulgences, only with this Difference, that they pay'd leſs Regard to Decency in the Gratification of them; for they were not aſhamed to act their Brutalities in open Day-light, and in the very Face of the Sun.

Theſe were the Principles and Practices of the ancient Philoſophers, and no doubt their Syſtems of *Ethicks* were entirely of a Piece with them; ſo that it ſeems upon the Whole, they might have been more properly call'd Schemes of Immorality than Morality: Whereas the Goſpel of Chriſt brings Men to a more juſt and more rational Way of thinking and acting. It teaches them to be humble and modeſt, good-natur'd and condeſcending, and to check all vain and opinionated Thoughts of themſelves, and every Thing that can lead them to have a diſdainful Contempt of others. It is ſo far from encouraging Revenge as a Mark of Heroiſm or Greatneſs of Soul, that it puts it

upon a Footing with the meaneſt Cowardice; and not only ſo, but likewiſe makes the forgiving an Injury or an Affront the only Condition, upon which we can expect Forgiveneſs at God's Hands. It enlarges the Circle of our good Offices, and inſtead of confining them to our Friends and Relations, to our Country and Community, embraces in one common Band of Benevolence the whole human Race: Nay, our very Enemies are not excluded by it from having a Share in our Love and Affections, in our Acts of Beneficence and Good-will. And as for our Government of the Paſſions, it does not require that we ſhould utterly eradicate them, but only that we ſhou'd reſtrain them and put them under the Direction of ſober Reaſon. Neither on the other Hand does it allow us in the Libertiniſm of the Epicure, or in the unnatural Indecencies, or ſhameleſs Effrontery of the brutiſh Cynick; but commands us to moderate our Deſires, to mortify the Fleſh with the Affections and Luſts, and to keep all our rebellious Paſſions and Appetites in proper Subjection to the governing Principles within us, to the Laws of Decency and Modeſty, and to that Rule of Life, which it clearly preſcribes to us.

And ſurely a Religion, which thus improves

proves and even refines upon Morality, muſt needs be much valued and regarded by every Friend to Morality. He cannot but rejoice in the Poſſeſſion of an Inſtitution, wherein the moral Duties are ſet forth to him in the plaineſt and moſt familiar Manner, and where he views them in the moſt amiable and engaging Light, moſt fitting for God to enjoin, and moſt beneficial for Man to practiſe.

Beſides, if we further conſider, that the Goſpel affords a clear and ſatisfactory Aſſurance of a future State, wherein Rewards will be beſtowed, and Puniſhments inflicted according to the Merit or Demerit of Men's Actions; this will be an additional Recommendation of it to the Lover of Morality, and give him an high Opinion of its Worth and Uſefulneſs. For without this Diſcovery of a Life to come, which the Goſpel makes, the Laws of Morality wou'd want proper Sanctions to enforce Obedience to them; and notwithſtanding the intrinſick Excellence of them and their manifeſt Tendency to promote the temporal Happineſs of Mankind, Men wou'd frequently be tempted to tranſgreſs them all, through the Violence of their Paſſions, and the importunate Calls of their unruly Deſires. Even we find that theſe Sanctions of future Rewards and Puniſh-

ments, ſtrong as they are with which the Laws of Morality are on all Sides fenced, are too often broke through and diſregarded: What then wou'd become of thoſe Laws, were they entirely left deſtitute of theſe prevailing Sanctions! Few, I am afraid, in ſuch Circumſtances wou'd have ſo diſintereſted a Regard for Virtue, as to practiſe *it* purely for its own Sake. Such a diſintereſted Scheme can only be calculated for ſome ſelect, refined Spirits, who by a commanding Reaſon and due Uſe of their Philoſophy, have prevailed upon themſelves to retire from the World, and to devote their whole Time to abſtract Speculation. But as for the Bulk of Mankind, it can have no Manner of Effect upon them: They can only be influenced by Hopes and Fears, by the Hopes of Rewards and the Fears of Puniſhment. All other Motives are too weak to keep them firmly attach'd to their Duty, and it is to no Purpoſe to talk to them of the Amiableneſs and Beauty of Virtue, ſo long as there is nothing elſe to recommend her to their Regard. So that the Man, who wou'd have the Practice of Morality ſecured as much as poſſible, will ever be a Well-wiſher to the Goſpel: For that alone contains ſuch Motives to the Performance of

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our Duty as work moſt powerfully and effectually upon the Minds of Men.

Nor is this all: The Lover of Morality muſt needs have a great Regard and Veneration for the Goſpel, as it diſpels his Doubts, and encourages his Hopes about his honeſt and ſincere Endeavours being accepted upon his Repentance and future Amendment. Every one, who takes the moſt ſlight and curſory Survey of his Actions, cannot but ſoon be ſenſible, that he hath departed in many and repeated Inſtances from the ſtrict Rules of Morality, and hath willfully and preſumptuouſly fallen ſhort of his Duty: He knows further that all Deviations and Neglects of this Kind are contrary to the Will of God, which is the true Standard of Morality; and conſequently that the divine Juſtice is concerned to puniſh ſuch Deviations and Neglects in a Degree proportionable to the Heinouſneſs of the Guilt. Now what ſhall this Man do, in order to reconcile himſelf to the Favour of God, and to ſatisfy his Juſtice? Even ſuppoſing he ſhou'd make Reſolutions of future Amendment, and ſhou'd actually live up to theſe Reſolutions, yet this wou'd not at all avail him, ſo long as he found nothing that cou'd cancel the Guilt of paſt Tranſgreſſions. The Guilt of *theſe*, in the Nature of Things, muſt neceſſarily remain,

notwithſtanding we ſhou'd be able to pay the moſt perfect and unſinning Obedience to God's Laws for the Time to come.

Here then the Expediency of the Goſpel Revelation fully appears to the Lover of Morality, raiſes his drooping Spirits, and encourages him to practiſe thoſe moral Duties, which otherwiſe he ſhou'd have deſpaired of performing acceptably. It provides for him an Atonement for paſt Tranſgreſſions, and aſſures to him Pardon for thoſe that are future, on Condition he honeſtly endeavours againſt them. It gives him a moſt glorious Diſplay of the Divine Goodneſs and Compaſſion, and at the ſame Time vindicates God's Juſtice in forgiving Offenders, manifeſting throughout the whole Scheme of Man's Redemption his utter Abhorrence and Deteſtation of Sin, and alſo his great Readineſs to receive the returning Sinner into his Favour and Mercy upon the moſt eaſy and reaſonable Terms. Can then the Man who is a Friend to Morality, and who wou'd have all Impediments and Diſcouragements removed that may hinder or embarraſs him in the Practice of *its* Duties, be by any Means an Enemy to the Goſpel Revelation? For the Goſpel removes all thoſe Difficulties and Diſcouragements that without it wou'd attend

tend the Performance of moral Duties, pointing out an eaſy Way of obtaining Forgiveneſs upon our Tranſgreſſions of them, and making our honeſt Endeavours accompanied with Faith in Chriſt's Merits, the only efficacious Terms of our Acceptance and Salvation.

And what muſt be an additional Recommendation of the Goſpel to the moral Man, is, The Promiſe that *it* gives to all true Believers of the gracious Aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit to ſecond their ſincere Endeavours in the Ways of Virtue and Happineſs. Though we are not able of ourſelves to do any Thing as of ourſelves, though we are not able to perform thoſe moral Duties, that unerring and conſtant Obedience to God's Laws, which are the indiſpenſable Conditions of the Goſpel Covenant; yet, as the Goſpel aſſures us of the Divine Grace aſſiſting and preventing us; aſſiſting us in the Practice of our Duty, and preventing us from falling into the Tranſgreſſion of it, provided we are not wanting to ourſelves, we may from that comfortable Aſſurance be encouraged to go on with Chearfulneſs in the Paths of Virtue, to go on from Strength to Strength, from Perfection to Perfection, till at laſt we come to receive the Reward of our religious Perſeverance, the Salva-

Salvation of our immortal Souls. Without the Aſſurance of this Divine Aid, we ſhould be greatly diſheartened, from a Conſciouſneſs of our own Inſufficiency, in the Practice of Morality, as we ſhould frequently find ourſelves unequal to it, and unable to live up to that Rule of Right which is fully explained to us in the Goſpel of Chriſt. And therefore the Lover of Morality cannot but have a great Value for that Goſpel, which ſupplies him with ſuch ſeaſonable Aſſiſtance, as will effectually bear him up, in Concurrence with his own hearty Endeavours, againſt the united Attacks of Sin and Satan, and enable him to perform the Conditions that are required of him in order to eternal Happineſs.

Upon the whole; in whatever View we conſider the Goſpel, we find that it explains, improves, and enforces Morality; throws Light upon ſeveral Obſcurities which occurred in it, and recommends the Duties of it to our Practice by the ſtrongeſt and moſt engaging Motives. Even the Myſteries contained in the Goſpel have a manifeſt practical Influence upon the Lives of its true Profeſſors, and evidently tend to promote the Cauſe of Morality among them. It is confeſſedly a moral Duty to love God; and yet what can ſo much raiſe our Love and Affection towards him, as his great

Love

Love in ſending his only Son into the World to dye for us, while we were Sinners? It is alſo confeſſedly a moral Duty, to love one another; and yet what can more ſtrongly recommend this Duty to our Practice, than the unparalleled Love of Chriſt towards us all, who comprehended the whole Race of Mankind in his benevolent Scheme of Mercy? For if Chriſt ſo loved us as to lay down his Life for our Sake, we ought certainly to love one another, and even to ſuffer ſome ſmall Inconveniences and Trouble for the Good and Advantage of our Fellow-Creatures. In ſhort, upon all Accounts the Goſpel will recommend itſelf to the Lover of Morality; It will enflame his Love towards the Deity, enlarge his friendly and ſocial Affections, and kindle in his Breaſt ſuch virtuous and good Diſpoſitions, as will qualify him for the Enjoyment of Heaven, for the peaceable Society of juſt Men made perfect. And therefore we may venture to affirm, which was the

IId Thing to be evinced, That none can be Well-wiſhers to Morality, whatever they may pretend to, who are not at the ſame Time Well-wiſhers to the Goſpel-Revelation. Men may diſſemble the Matter as much as they pleaſe, may ſeemingly be ſtrenuous Advocates in the Cauſe of Morality; yet this can be nothing

thing but Shew and Pretence, ſo long as they are impertinently induſtrious in running down and depreciating the Goſpel. For the Intereſts of Morality and the Goſpel are the ſame; ſo that thoſe who have a real Regard for the one, muſt have an equal Regard for the other; and conſequently thoſe who ſlight and deſpiſe *either*, have certainly at the Bottom a Diſlike to both. And indeed this Diſlike is not hard to be accounted for: Either theſe Men are againſt thoſe moral Rules of Life laid down in the Goſpel, becauſe theſe are ſo many Reſtraints upon their unruly Luſts and ungovernable Appetites; or they are ſuch as are under the Subjection of Pride and Vanity, which make them affect Singularity in their religious Sentiments. Such Men ſcorn to think in the common Road: They ſtrike out into new Tracks of their own, and had rather wander in the Paths of Error by themſelves, than go ſecurely with others in the Ways of Truth. 'Tis no wonder that both theſe ſorts of Men ſhould be Enemies to every Thing that is againſt their reigning Paſſions. Thoſe eſpecially, who are Lovers of ſinful Pleaſures, who give an unreſtrained Indulgence to their vitious Deſires, will hardly be Friends to that Inſtitution, which enjoins Men to deny all Ungodlineſs

lineſs and worldly Luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World: And yet thoſe very Men pretend a Regard to Morality, though at the ſame Time they hate that Inſtitution, which thus enjoins the Practice of the moral Duties. A ſtrange Contradiction this! Whatever they may pretend, it muſt be plain to every one who eyes the Behaviour of ſuch Men, that they pay no Regard in their Lives either to Morality or Religion, but that they are thorough Libertines both in Principle and Practice. They wiſh that there was no Truth in the Goſpel; for then they might give full Scope to their depraved Inclinations: From wiſhing this, they eaſily perſuade themſelves that there is none in it. And from thence the Tranſition is very ſhort to a ſuitable Practice. They wiſh and believe that whatever is told them in the Goſpel concerning Virtue and Vice, concerning the Rewards that await the one, and the Puniſhments that will overtake the other in a future State, is all Dream and Whimſy, the Effects of blind Credulity, and more blind Superſtition; and when they have brought themſelves to ſuch a Belief, they then can in ſome Sort be eaſy in their Vices, and be free from all thoſe Checks that might otherwiſe obſtruct them in a Courſe of Wickedneſs.

cdnefs. Thus do they break through all the Laws of Morality, from an idle Pretence of diſbelieving the Goſpel, though the true Cauſe is, that they neither regard one nor the other, but are reſolved in Deſpite of them both to indulge their Vices, and to live according to their wicked Humour and Inclination. So that when you hear a Man cry up Morality and run down the Goſpel, you may take it for granted that he is a Friend to *neither*, that the Gratification of his ſenſual Appetites is the Point he has in View, and that he has no other End to ſerve in depreciating the Goſpel, but that he may weaken, nay, if poſſible, deſtroy the Obligations of Morality, and by that Means remove all reſtraints of Conſcience with Regard to his immoral Behaviour.

As for thoſe, who affect Singularity in their religious Notions, and who, from this Affectation, diſregard the Goſpel; ſuch are in Truth mere *Proteus's* in Religion, and are reſolved to diſſent from every Thing, be it never ſo reaſonable, which comes once to be univerſally received and believed. And as it is the Fate of the Goſpel to be an old-faſhioned Scheme of Religion, which has paſſed current for ſeveral hundred Years, they are determined to oppoſe it to the utmoſt, and

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to uſe all the Arts they are Maſters of, to bring it into Diſrepute, and to undermine its Authority, in order to make Way for their own novel Schemes. And yet ſuch is the whimſical Humour of theſe Men, that ſhould it ever happen their Schemes ſhould be eſtabliſhed, it is more than probable, that they would be the firſt that would diſſent from them, that they would once more change Sides, labour to overthrow thoſe very Schemes they took ſo much Pains to propagate, and even in Oppoſition thereto, endeavour to introduce again the Goſpel itſelf, which they had before been ſo zealous in exploding. Men of this innovating Turn are well characterized in the Aſſertion of one of our modern Infidels, who declared, That if his Opinions were received to-Day, he would oppoſe them to-Morrow. They are Perſons of changeable, wavering Diſpoſitions, who are fond of Novelties, and who will ſacrifice the great Truths of both Morality and Religion to an odd Conceit, or to any Thing of an uncommon Stamp, be it ever ſo extravagant. They ridicule the Goſpel, becauſe it has been cuſtomary with the Generality of Mankind to revere and reſpect it; and have ſet up in Oppoſition to it a ſtrange Kind of Morality, which is not to be found in the Writings of

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any that went before them, either of Chriſtian, Jewiſh, or even ſober Heathen Moraliſts. In ſhort, was the Morality of theſe moral Philoſophers attended to and practiſed, we ſhould find it would end in the groſſeſt Immorality; that Men would have no other Standard of their Actions but the Humour and Caprice of ſuch; and that, in Conſequence thereof, an unbounded Licentiouſneſs of Manners would be introduced into the World, equally deſtructive of the Welfare and Happineſs of Society in general, and of the particular Peace and Satisfaction of every private Perſon. So that let ſuch Innovators pretend what they will, true Morality is as little obliged to them as Chriſtianity, inaſmuch as the Schemes they endeavour to ſet on Foot are evidently prejudicial to them both, and naturally tend to draw Men into a Diſregard of both the one and the other; which would unavoidably be attended with very pernicious and dangerous Conſequences.

From what has been ſaid, we may fairly deduce this one uſeful Inference, namely, That every honeſt, good Man, who is ſincerely deſirous of knowing and performing the Will of God, and who has no other Intereſt to ſerve but *that* of Truth and Virtue, will never be an Enemy to the Goſpel Revelation.

lation. He will find all its Doctrines and Precepts entirely adapted to the Temper and Diſpoſition of his Mind, and will have no Pretence ſecretly to wiſh, that they were not true. It is his Deſire to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World; and this is nothing more than what the Goſpel requires of him: So that it will be entirely agreeable to him to conform his Life to its Rules, and to that Uprightneſs of Manners, which it every where moſt powerfully recommends. Thoſe who are Enemies to the Goſpel, are Enemies to it, becauſe it is an Enemy to their Vices, and lays a Reſtraint upon their rebellious Paſſions. And hence it is, that they take up a Prejudice againſt it, and would gladly perſuade themſelves that it is all an Impoſture; for they know to their Sorrow, that if it be true they run a moſt deſperate Hazard. But thoſe who are well-diſpoſed, and who are determined to make God's Will the Rule of their Conduct, as far as it is diſcoverable by them, can have no Prepoſſeſſions of this Kind againſt the Goſpel. They ſee the Reaſonableneſs of it, and how well it is calculated to promote their preſent and future Welfare. Their Paſſions and Appetites do not propoſe to them

ſeparate Intereſts, or ſuch Intereſts as in any ſort claſh or interfere with its main Deſign; ſo that they have no falſe Byaſs upon their Minds to draw them aſide from the Practice of its Duties; but inſtead of being prejudiced againſt it, on account of the Purity of its Doctrines, they are for that very Reaſon prejudiced in its Favour. And therefore,

To conclude; Leave but your Vices, and then the Light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt will break in upon your Minds with irreſiſtable Force, will diſpel thoſe Clouds of Error and Ignorance which before overcaſt and darkened your Underſtandings, and will lead your Feet into the Paths of Virtue and Truth, which are juſtly called, the Paths of Peace. When once you have diſengaged yourſelves from your Sins, you will want no other Arguments for your Belief of the Goſpel. The grand Support and Foundation of Infidelity is laid in Men's Vices. Could they once be prevailed upon to part with theſe, they would immediately become Believers, and readily acknowledge Chriſt to be their Saviour and Redeemer: But while they ſuffer themſelves to be hurried away by the Impetuoſity of their favourite Paſſions into the Commiſſion of Wickedneſs, 'tis no Wonder, that they ſhould

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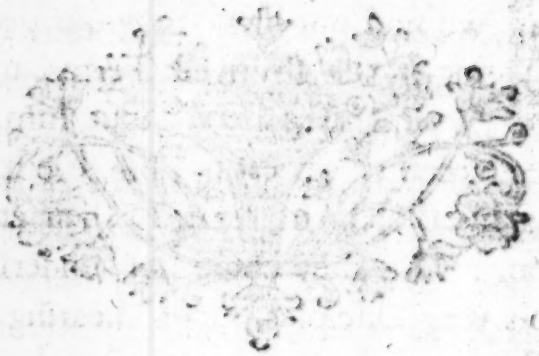
decry and vilify that Goſpel, in which the Wrath of God is revealed from Heaven againſt all Ungodlineſs and Unrighteouſneſs of Men. Be but heartily diſpoſed then to obey God's Will, and you will chearfully embrace the Revelation he has given of it. You will endeavour to adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour in all Things, and to pay that uniform and conſtant Obedience to the Divine Laws, which is the Condition of the Goſpel-Covenant, and by which you will be entitled to a glorious Inheritance among them who are ſanctified through Faith in Chriſt Jeſus.



SERMON XI.

JOHN vi. 68.

Then Simon Peter anſwered him; Lord, to whom ſhall we go? Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life.

IN the Verſes preceding the Text, we find our bleſſed Saviour declaring in the ſtrongeſt Terms, to the *Jews* and others about him, the abſolute Neceſſity of eating his Fleſh and drinking his Blood, in order to their eternal Salvation. This they could not underſtand. Nay, his very Diſciples, upon hearing this, ſaid, *This is a hard Saying, who can bear it?* When Jeſus knew in himſelf, that his Diſciples murmured at it, he endeavours to convince them, that the Doctrine which he taught them, was of a ſpiritual Nature, and

not of a carnal: *For*, ſays he, *it is the Spirit that quickeneth, the Fleſh profiteth nothing; the Words that I ſpeak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are Life.* After he had thus explained himſelf, and that he was ſpiritually, not carnally and literally, to be fed upon, he plainly declares to them, That the true Reaſon of their being offended at what he had ſaid, was their Obſtinacy and Unbelief. This was too heinous a Charge for them not to be chagrin'd with, and accordingly we find many of them to forſake him upon it, and to abandon his Company. Which he perceiving, ſaid unto the Twelve, *Will ye alſo go away?* Signifying that it would give him more Regret and Concern to be abandoned by them, than by all the reſt. There is ſomething very moving and tender in this Expreſſion, it being the Language of one, who is apprehenſive of being forſaken by thoſe, who once made the warmeſt Profeſſions of Love and Affection for him. Then *Peter*, nearly touch'd with his Maſter's Diſtreſs, and willing to raiſe his drooping Spirits, return'd him this Anſwer, in his own Name and in the Name of his Fellow-Diſciples, *Lord, to whom ſhall we go, thou haſt the Words of eternal Life.* As if he had ſaid, To whom ſhall we apply, when we have left thee, that can better inſtruct

ſtruct us what Things are neceſſary in order to Salvation? For in thy Doctrines are contained the Words of eternal Life, every Thing that we have Occaſion to know or practiſe, as the Means to bring us to Heaven and eternal Happineſs. In which Anſwer of St. *Peter*, two Things offer themſelves for the Subject of our preſent Diſcourſe.

I. That no Schemes of Religion, which are in any Reſpect contrary to the Goſpel of Chriſt, can at all afford us a rational Satisfaction with Regard to Points of the utmoſt Importance, *Lord, to whom ſhall we go?*

II. That this Satisfaction is to be found in his Goſpel: *Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life.*

I. We will endeavour to prove, That no Schemes of Religion, which are in any Reſpect contrary to the Goſpel of Chriſt, can at all afford us rational Satisfaction, with Regard to Points of the utmoſt Importance: *Lord, to whom ſhall we go?*

Here let us apply ourſelves to thoſe ſeveral Sorts of Men, who broach and maintain Doctrines in direct Oppoſition to the Goſpel, and ſee and enquire, whether the Notions they advance and defend, are capable of giving us that Sort of Satisfaction we want.

1*ſt*, Let us conſult the Atheiſt, and examine his Principles, whether they have any Thing in them, than can ſatisfy the Mind. Now his Principles, if you will credit him, are theſe: That there is no God; that Man was made by Chance; that he is an unaccountable Creature; and that, as he was born, ſo ſhall he die like the Beaſts of the Field, without any Hopes or Fears of what may happen to him hereafter. A very extraordinary Beginning this, an intermediate Space correſpondent to it, and an End quite ſuitable to both! And can we find any Satisfaction, or will the Mind receive any Comfort, in a Scheme of this ſurprizing Nature? Can it be joyous to us to think, that there is no wiſe, and good, and juſt Being that governs and directs the Affairs of the World, but that every Thing is left to the irregular Motions of an undeſigning Chance; and that we are the Children of Fortune, toſs'd and bandied about like *Epicurus*'s Atoms, in an infinite Space, without having any ſettled Place of Reſt? Thus to live without a God in the World, to be deſtitute of a Helper to fly to in Time of Need, and to be entirely at the Will of capricious Fortune, is certainly the moſt deplorable Situation that can poſſibly be conceived. It is ſome Alleviation

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to Misfortunes, to consider that there is a Being that is able and willing to support us under them, that there is nothing can befal us but by his Permission, and that both Prosperity and Adversity are allotted us for some wise and benevolent Purpose. The Consideration of such a Being is a sovereign Remedy against all the Evils and Afflictions of Life, and even adds to the Pleasures and Enjoyments of it. If we are in Adversity and Trouble, we know, and it rejoices us to know, that we have one Friend in the World to comfort and refresh us, to apply Balm to our Maladies, and to give us Chearfulness of Countenance and Serenity of Mind in the most trying and complicated Circumstances of Distress. Or, if we are under the Smiles of Prosperity, and enjoy the most valuable Gifts of Fortune, we bless that God who so highly favoured us: We take Satisfaction and Complacency in the good Things he hath given us, and make them subservient to our own Welfare, and the Welfare of others, by a proper Use and Application.

Whereas the Atheist reverses every thing, blackens the whole Face of Nature, and turns the World into a mere Scene of Darkness and Despair. All is nothing but Confusion and Disorder upon his uncomfortable Scheme,

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and he had better, infinitely better remove the Sun out of the Firmament of Heaven, than baniſh a God out of the World. For, beſides that it wou'd render Proſperity joyleſs, and Adverſity inſupportable, it has this Miſchief alſo attending it, that it wou'd ſet Men at Liberty from all Reſtraints of Religion and Conſcience; the Conſequence of which wou'd be, that *every Man's Hand wou'd be againſt every Man*, that the ſtrongeſt wou'd cruſh and deſtroy the Weakeſt, and that Murders, Maſſacres, and all manner of Violence wou'd be committed without Remorſe and without Controul. And can there be any Comfort or Satisfaction in ſuch a precarious State of Things, where there is no Almighty Being plac'd at the Helm to preſerve Order, where there is no Law given as a Rule to human Conduct, but where every one is governed by his Humour, or Intereſt, or any other ſelfiſh, ungenerous Principle? In ſuch a State, it cannot be ſuppoſed that Reaſon ſhou'd be farther attended to, than as it ſerved as a Dupe to the Paſſions, than as it ſerved to provide for *the Fleſh to fulfill the Luſts thereof*, and to find out Variety of ſenſual Gratifications whereupon to indulge them. So that the Atheiſt by baniſhing a God, baniſhes together with him

him all that is good and deſirable: Every Virtue is confounded and diſappears: Truth, Juſtice, and Honeſty are no more; and in the Place of theſe are ſubſtituted, Diſſimulation, Injuſtice, and Diſhoneſty, with Oppreſſion and Cruelty in their various Shapes. A ſtrange Scene of Things this for Men to be delighted and ſatisfied with! and yet this is what the Atheiſt promiſes upon his unnatural, but as he thinks, encouraging Scheme.

Nor is the End of Man, according to the Atheiſt's Scheme, more ſatisfactory to him beforehand, than his Beginning. He believes that he ſhall be annihilated upon Death, that the *Spirit ſhall vaniſh into ſoft Air*, the Body return to its native Duſt, and the whole Man become as tho' he had never been: And yet we find in ourſelves, implanted in our very Nature, a Deſire of Happineſs, which Deſire cannot be ſatisfied on this Side the Grave; and therefore we have Longings after Happineſs in another Life, which will prove adequate and proportionate to that Deſire. But then if what the Atheiſt ſays be true, that there is no other Life but the preſent, what will become of the Happineſs we long for, and which is not to be obtained here? We diſquiet ourſelves in vain, and are engaged in an endleſs Purſuit after

after a viſionary Thing, a Creature of the Fancy. Happineſs we are ſure is not to be found in this Life, and the Atheiſt tells us that there is no other Life for it; and yet we are continually hankering after it; though we are told that it is not to be had. So that upon the Atheiſt's uncomfortable Scheme, tho' we have a natural Deſire of Happineſs implanted in us, yet there is no Happineſs ſuited to that Deſire, the Conſideration of which muſt needs be unſatisfactory to us, inaſmuch as we ſhall always be ſollicitous for that, which is not to be obtained.

Upon the Whole; in whatever View we conſider the Atheiſt's Scheme, we can find nothing in it that can give any Satisfaction to the Mind of Man. It deſtroys all true Reliſh for the Enjoyments of this Life, and diſappoints and makes vain all our Hopes and Deſires of the Happineſs of the next. We muſt not then apply to the Atheiſt for Satisfaction in Religion; for he ſtrikes at the very Root of all Religion, and ſtrives to baniſh it out of the World; and yet it is the only Thing, that can make Life tolerable, or can ſupport us under the Trials and Afflictions of it. Let us then,

II. Apply to the Deiſt, and ſee whether his Scheme can afford us the wiſh'd-for Satisfaction.

tisfaction. Now he bids much fairer for giving us Satisfaction than the Atheiſt; for he allows of a God, a Providence, and a future State; and ſo far we join Iſſue with him, and allow him to be right: But then he ſets up Reaſon as his only Guide in Matters of Religion, diſclaims all Revelation, and of Courſe diſbelieves every Thing that is contained in it. Here his Principles are defective with Regard to affording us rational Satisfaction. That Reaſon is a ſufficient Guide in Matters of Religion, we abſolutely deny: For we find that thoſe Men, who liv'd in the Ages before Revelation, cou'd not diſcover more by its Light than the Outlines, as it were, of their Duty, and were left in Ignorance and Darkneſs as to ſeveral Points of very great Importance to them to know. For Inſtance, they found that they had fallen from that Original Uprightneſs and Perfection in which they were created, that they had thereby forfeited the Divine Favour and Eſteem, and that they were brought into a State of Sin and Wickedneſs: but how to recover themſelves from it, all their Sagacity and Learning cou'd not inform them: They had Recourſe to ſeveral Expedients, but all were inſufficient and unſatisfactory. And ſurely if the Deiſt goes

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upon the ſame Principles with them, he muſt be reduced to much the ſame Difficulties. He cannot be ſo vain as pretend that his Reaſon is more perfect than theirs, that *Socrates*, *Plato*, and *Tully*, with other ancient Philoſophers, were ſhortſighted Men, Men of no Diſcernment in Compariſon of him. If he exceeds them in any Thing, it muſt be owing to the Light he hath received from Revelation, whoſe Authority he will not admit of, and not to any ſuperior Parts or Abilities of his own.

But let us ſee what extraordinary Diſcoveries this Man of deep Penetration hath made, and what he hath ſubſtituted in the Room of Revelation, ſufficient to give us the Satisfaction we want. Well, he ſays he hath diſcovered by the Light of Reaſon and Nature, that we are able to do all of ourſelves that is required of us to do, that our Nature is now as perfect as ever it was, and that we have no need of he knows not what ſupernatural Aids to aſſiſt us in the Knowledge and Practice of our Duty. It wou'd be well for us, if he cou'd make good what he ſo readily aſſerts: For it is not his Saying that we are this or that Sort of Creatures, that will make us ſo, but he muſt likewiſe back what he ſays by ſuch undeniable Arguments

as cannot be gainſayed: But it is his Misfortune and our Unhappineſs, that both the Reaſon which he boaſts in, and our own Experience mutually conſpire to overthrow and confute his Aſſertion. Does not Reaſon tell us, that Creatures ſo averſe to Good, and ſo prone to Evil, as our own Experience daily convinces us we are, cou'd never come immediately out of their Maker's Hand? Does it not tell us that we came from thence perfect, that the Powers of the Soul preſerved a certain Harmony and Agreement with one another, but that through our own Faults, through an Abuſe of our Free-will, this Harmony was deſtroyed and Sin introduced. And are we then Creatures as perfect now as ever? Do we not continually feel and lament a certain Degeneracy and Corruption in our Nature which daily tempts us to tranſgreſs our Duty and to run into Exceſs? And will the Deiſt ſay with all his boaſted Reaſon, that God cou'd, conſiſtently with his Holineſs and Juſtice, accept or pardon Creatures thus ſtained and polluted with Sin? Or can he ſay that Repentance and future Amendment alone will attone for paſt Tranſgreſſions, will appeaſe the divine Juſtice; when his Reaſon will tell him, if he only attends to it, that Repentance and Amendment are quite

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unavailable in Regard to procuring Pardon for Sins once committed? For properly and ſtrictly ſpeaking, Sins once committed, will not or cannot be attoned for by our not being guilty of the like for the future. Something elſe therefore muſt be found out to reconcile us to God after Tranſgreſſion, beſides Repentance and future Amendment.

And what he ſays, of our not wanting ſupernatural Aids to enable us to know and practiſe our Duty, is entirely contrary to our own Senſe and Experience of the Matter. We feel and acknowledge a certain Backwardneſs to do good, or, as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, a *Law in our Members warring againſt the Law of our Mind*, and *bringing us in Subjection to the Law of Sin, which is in our Members.* We all feel and lament this our Weakneſs, and wou'd be willing to apply a Remedy ſufficient to relieve and ſupport us under it. And will then the Deiſt's aſſerting, that we want no Aſſiſtance, make us believe that we do not, though our own woful Experience loudly aſſerts the contrary? Can we be thoroughly ſatisfied in our Minds, that we are as perfect Creatures as he repreſents us to be, when at the ſame Time we find ourſelves ſubject to Imperfection, Error, and Sin? It wou'd be ſtrange, if we cou'd

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acquieſce in what he ſays, notwithſtanding what he ſays is either contradicted by Reaſon or Experience. So that, upon the Deiſt's Scheme, we cannot poſſibly find any tolerable Satisfaction, but on the contrary, are in a State of Doubt and Perplexity as to ſeveral Points, which want to be clear'd up. Wou'd he allow us the Benefit of Revelation, we ſhou'd then be eaſy and ſatisfied; for in it, as we ſhall afterwards ſhew, Satisfaction is only to be found. But this he abſolutely diſclaims, and will not acquieſce in the Truth of it, though it comes confirmed to him by divine Authority.

Let us then ſee what he objects againſt it, and whether his Objections are powerful enough to deſtroy the Authority with which it is ſupported. He urges that the Law of Nature, the Law of Right and Wrong implanted in every Man's Breaſt, acquaints us with every Thing that is neceſſary for us to know and to practiſe, and therefore that we have no Occaſion for any Revelation. But this, as we before obſerved, he urges without any Foundation. The contrary evidently appears from the Confeſſions of thoſe who never were favour'd with a divine Revelation. They confeſs'd their Ignorance and Weak-

neſs and the great Need they had of ſome additional Guide, beſides the Light of Reaſon and Nature, to help them forward in the Practice of their Duty. And ſurely he cannot ſay that his Nature is more perfect, and his Reaſon more enlightened than theirs, and conſequently that he has no Occaſion for what they wanted. If he wou'd ſpeak out freely and ingenuouſly, he muſt own himſelf to be under equal Difficulties with them, and equally diſſatisfied. But there is a certain Pride in Men of this Make, which will not ſuffer them to be beholden to any foreign Aſſiſtance, however greatly they may find themſelves to ſtand in need of it.

Rather than ſubmit to the Guidance of divine Revelation, he will venture to aſſert further, that the Evidence which is brought to prove the Truth of it, is not ſufficient for the Purpoſe, but is weak and by no Means able to bear the Weight that is laid upon it. Now we will appeal to the Judgment of all reaſonable Men, whether this his Aſſertion is well grounded or no. We do not believe a Revelation to come from God merely upon the Credit of any Teacher that pretends to be inſpired; for then we ſhou'd lay ourſelves open to daily Cheats and Impoſitions. But

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we require from every Teacher that delivers a Revelation as coming from God, to give us Evidence of the Truth of what he delivers, by working Miracles; Miracles that far exceed the Power of created Beings to perform, and which can be aſcribed to nothing but the Finger of God. And yet ſuch Miracles as theſe did *Moſes*, did Chriſt and his Apoſtles perform in Confirmation of the divine Revelations which they communicated to the World; and it is upon the Strength of this Evidence that we believe them to be true. And indeed what can we believe to be true, if we do not believe *that*, the Truth of which comes recommended and enforced, by a Diſplay of Omnipotence? That is ſo far ſuperior to all the puny Efforts of Men or Spirits, that there is no Room for Deluſion or Impoſture in the Caſe. The Deiſt himſelf might diſtinguiſh betwixt them, was not his Mind unaccountably prejudiced, and was not he attach'd to ſome other Intereſt, beſides that of Truth and Virtue. Are we not then, according to the Deiſt's Principles, to believe any Revelation, whatever Evidence it may have from Miracles of its being true! Or muſt we ſay that God is not able to make a Revelation of his Will to Mankind? Or, in

other Words, muſt we ſay that God does not reveal it to us, though we have all the Reaſon in the World to believe that he does? This he will hardly be brought openly to declare: But then to evade anſwering theſe Queſtions, and yet nevertheleſs to weaken the Authority of Revelation, he will diſpute whether ſuch Miracles were ever or no wrought in Confirmation of that Revelation, and whether the Contents of it have been conveyed down to us genuine and uncorrupt. Now all that we ſhall here oppoſe to him is, That we have as much Reaſon to believe theſe Things as the Nature of the Things themſelves will admit of; which is all that a reaſonable Man can deſire. Facts done a great while ago are not capable of Mathematical Demonſtration. It is enough that we arrive at Moral Certainty about them, ſuch Certainty, as ſatisfies the Deiſt himſelf in all Matters, where Religion is not concerned. And this we have with Regard to the Miracles that were wrought to confirm Revelation, and alſo with Regard to the Contents of that Revelation thus confirmed. We have a ſtanding, written Tradition, which gives us a plain, eaſy Account of ſuch and ſuch Miracles being wrought, which wou'd certainly

tainly have been deſtroyed at its firſt Publication had it not been true; and that this ſtanding, written Tradition hath all along been kept genuine and uncorrupt, appears from the Harmony and Agreement of various Copies of it, as to all the material Points contained therein, and alſo from the concurring Teſtimony of both ſacred and profane Writers, who have occaſionally mentioned in their Diſcourſes ſomething relating to this written Tradition.

So that, you ſee, upon the Whole, we muſt either give up the Deiſt and his Scheme, or act in Contradiction both to Reaſon and Experience. His Principles are by no Means defenſible, nor can at all afford a rational Satisfaction to a Mind that is eager in the Purſuit of Truth and Happineſs. Leaving him then to the Grace of God's Holy Spirit, which is able to open his Eyes and to lead him to the Knowledge of thoſe Things that will make for his Peace both here and hereafter; we will proceed to ſhew,

II. That the Satisfaction we have hitherto ſought for in vain, with Regard to ſeveral important Points, is to be found in the Goſpel of Chriſt: *Thou haſt the Words of eternal Life.* Here all our Doubts are reſolved, all

Difficulties cleared up, and every Chriſtian hath a comfortable Aſſurance of being accepted and rewarded by God, though he cannot arrive in his preſent fallen State to a Life of ſinleſs Perfection. What we loſt in *Adam*, is in ſome Meaſure reſtored to us in Chriſt. Though we cannot perform perfect unſinning Obedience, yet we may perform ſuch Obedience, as may entitle us through Chriſt to the divine Favour, and purchaſe for us an *Inheritance among them that are ſanctified through Faith.* We may now be ſatisfied of the Efficacy and Virtue of our ſincere Repentance after Tranſgreſſion, which is a Degree of Satisfaction, neither the Heathen who wanted Revelation, nor the modern Deiſt, who utterly diſclaims it, cou'd ever obtain. All that they have to truſt to is the Mercy and Goodneſs of God; and indeed we will not preſume to ſet Bounds to thoſe his amiable Attributes: But then we may venture to ſay, that theſe will never ſway him to do any Thing that is not conſiſtent with his Juſtice and Holineſs; which, if we may judge from the Nature of the Thing, wou'd actually be the Caſe, ſhou'd God pardon Sinners, as all Men muſt own themſelves more or leſs to be, upon their Repentance,

tance, without any further Atonement to be made. Now a Chriſtian, who believes in the Goſpel, ſees God's Juſtice reconciled to his other Attributes, with Regard to the Sinner's Forgiveneſs. The Merits of our Saviour are imputed to us to ſupply the Defects of our Religious Services, and what we cou'd not have had any Claim to of ourſelves, is graciouſly tender'd to us through Chriſt. He has fully ſatisfied the moſt rigid Demands of divine Juſtice by the Sacrifice of himſelf, and has opened us an eaſy Way through the Veil, that is to ſay his Fleſh, into his Kingdom of Glory and Happineſs. Upon the Chriſtian Scheme, we have nothing more to do, but to uſe our honeſt and ſincere Endeavours after Virtue and Holineſs, and all other Things that are neceſſary to Salvation ſhall be added unto us. We may indulge ourſelves in reflecting, that we are delivered through Chriſt from all thoſe perplexing Thoughts that harraſſed and diſturbed the Minds of thoſe, who never heard of his Name, and are ſet at Liberty from all miſgiving Apprehenſions about the Efficacy of Repentance and future Amendment.

In ſhort, the Goſpel contains in it the Words of eternal Life, and clearly points out

to us the Means of attaining it. There is nothing wanting, if we are not wanting to ourſelves, to make us happy: The Blame muſt be laid at our own Doors, if notwithſtanding what Chriſt hath done and ſuffered for us, we ſtill neglect ſo great Salvation, and will not lay hold of the Happineſs, which he hath offered to us in his Goſpel. Therein we have more Satisfaction and greater Encouragement to a virtuous and holy Practice, than any other Schemes of Religion can poſſibly afford us. They all are attended with unſurmountable Difficulties, and are ſo far from giving us the Satisfaction we deſire, that they fill us with Fears and Scruples, with Doubts and Perplexities: Whereas, upon the Chriſtian Scheme, all is encouraging and ſatisfactory, and we are promiſed the glorious Reward of eternal Life upon the eaſy Terms of our endeavouring to obtain it.

Let us then hold faſt the Profeſſion of our Faith without wavering, and let us not give in to any Novel Schemes that tend to undermine the great Truths of Chriſtianity: For when once we have renounced theſe we ſhall find nothing to ſubſtitute in their Room, that can give any Eaſe or Comfort to our Minds. And, as a Sign that we are grounded and eſtabliſhed

eſtabliſhed in the Faith of Chriſt, let us conform our Lives to his ſacred Precepts, and make his Example the Rule of our Conduct: Let us be careful to adorn his Doctrine in all Things, and not contradict or deny him in our Actions, whom we profeſs in our Words. Thus ſhall we live to him, who died and roſe again for us, and at laſt aſcend to that Place, whither he is gone before to prepare Manſions of eternal Bliſs for his faithful and obedient Servants.

SERMON XII.

ROM. vi. 23.

For the Wages of Sin is Death; but the Gift of God is eternal Life, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

AMONG the many Difficulties, which attend the Infidel-Scheme, and all the Schemes of Religion, which are not agreeable to the Chriſtian Revelation, this is none of the leaſt, that Repentance is not a ſufficient Atonement for Sins once committed, nor conſequently can the Sinner upon his Repentance have any reaſonable Pretenſions to Happineſs. For every Tranſgreſſion of the Divine Law ſubjects us to Puniſhment; and as all Men have in many and repeated Inſtances tranſgreſſed that Law, and fallen infinitely ſhort of perfect Obedience, they muſt expect to be puniſhed

niſhed in Proportion to their Guilt. Indeed were there no other Attributes in the Deity but Mercy, they might have ſome Hopes of having their Sins pardoned upon their Repentance, and that God would not be extreme to mark what they did amiſs; but then as Juſtice is found to be as eſſential to his Nature as Mercy, that Attribute is concerned to ſee, that Puniſhment ſhould be inflicted upon every Violation of his ſacred Law. So that the great Difficulty is, how to reconcile God's Juſtice with his Mercy in Reſpect of the Sinner's Forgiveneſs; and how he may be admitted into the Divine Favour notwithſtanding his many and repeated Tranſgreſſions. Now the Goſpel-Revelation removes this Difficulty, points out a Method whereby the Puniſhment due to Sin is remitted, and propoſes ſuch gracious Terms of Mercy, as that the Sinner may be pardoned conſiſtently with Divine Juſtice, and be again entitled to the Privilege of eternal Life, which he had juſtly forfeited. *For the Wages of Sin is Death; but the Gift of God is eternal Life, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* That is, as Death or Puniſhment is the Effect of Sin, ſo eternal Life or Happineſs is an Act of God's free Grace and Favour, through the Merits of his Son. I ſhall therefore, in order to make

make out the more clearly the Truth of the Doctrine contained in the Text,

I. Shew, That Sin, or a Tranſgreſſion of the Law of God, ſubjects a Man to both a temporal and ſpiritual Death: *The Wages of Sin is Death.*

II. That eternal Life or Happineſs, is a Thing of ſuch ineſtimable Value, as that nothing we can do, as that even perfect Obedience to the whole Law could by no Means merit it; and therefore we are to conſider it merely as a Gift of God: *The Gift of God is eternal Life.* And,

III. That this Gift is made to us by God on Conſideration of the all-ſufficient Merits of his Son our Saviour: *But the Gift of God is eternal Life, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.*

I. I am to ſhew, That Sin, or a Tranſgreſſion of the Law of God, ſubjects a Man both to a temporal and a ſpiritual Death; *The Wages of Sin is Death.* As to a temporal Death occaſioned by Sin, the Command which was given to *Adam* in *Paradiſe* concerning it, was ſo very ſtrong and expreſs, as it could not admit of any the leaſt Abatement with Regard to the Execution of it:

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Of every Tree of the Garden, ſays God to him, *thou mayeſt freely eat; but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil thou ſhalt not eat of it; for in the Day that thou eateſt thereof, thou ſhalt ſurely die.* Accordingly, after his Tranſgreſſion, that Part of the Curſe relating to his Mortality, immediately took Place; that is, he became ſubject to it; and in Conſequence thereof, it has ever ſince been entailed upon his unhappy Deſcendants. It cannot indeed be ſuppoſed that *Adam*, though he had ſtill preſerved his Innocence, could have been exempted from Death by any Virtue peculiar to his natural Frame and Conſtitution: For as his Body was compounded of Matter, it muſt neceſſarily have been ſubject to Diſſolution and Death. So that the Privilege of Immortality, which God promiſed to confer upon him, while he kept his Innocence, muſt be reſolved into a mere Act of Grace and Favour, and cannot be aſcribed to any Thing in himſelf that could qualify him for it. However this we find, that he had no ſooner loſt his Innocence by diſobeying the Command of his Maker, than he became mortal, than he forfeited the ſupernatural Grant of Immortality which was made him, and fell into that decaying, though natural State, which

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ſtill continues to be the Condition of all his Poſterity. Death followed cloſe upon Sin; and he no ſooner loſt his Innocence, than he forfeited his Title to Immortality, and became obnoxious to thoſe Pains and Diſorders which naturally end in the Diſſolution of the Body.

Nor does Sin leſs ſubject us to a ſpiritual, than a temporal Death. By a ſpiritual Death, I mean, that Incapacity of enjoying Happineſs which we bring upon ourſelves by undue Elections, and a conſequent wrong Conduct; by ſuch a Conduct as renders us unfit Objects of the Divine Favour from the very Nature of the Thing, and of Courſe expoſes us to ſome Degree of Miſery. Now Sin is the Parent of this Kind of Death: It ſubjects the Spirit to the Fleſh, and the intellectual Faculties of the Soul to the ſenſual Appetites; by which Means Diſorder is introduced into the human Frame, and Reaſon, which was deſigned to be the ruling Principle within us, becomes obedient to the Dictates of unbridled Paſſions. And when the Order and Oeconomy, which originally ſubſiſted among the reſpective Powers of Mind and Body, are thus deſtroy'd, there muſt neceſſarily enſue a Tranſgreſſion of the Divine Law. For it cannot be ſuppoſed, that *that* ſhould

ſhould be kept inviolate, while our Behaviour is under the Influence and Government of rebellious Appetites. And when the Divine Law is once tranſgreſs'd, the Divine Favour is forfeited: For every Tranſgreſſion of the Divine Command is an Act of Rebellion againſt the Lawgiver; for which, to maintain his own Honour and the Authority of his Laws, he requires the Tranſgreſſor ſhould be puniſhed. So that the Man who goes on in a continued Courſe of ſinning, may properly enough be ſaid to be dead while he liveth: He is dead to all the Purpoſes of Virtue and Religion, to all the Calls and Invitations of Reaſon and Conſcience, and only lives to make Proviſion for his ſenſual Part, and to gratify the Fleſh; which is the Life of a Brute, not of a rational intelligent Creature. How ſuch a Creature can be ſaid to live, or attain to the Happineſs for which he was intended, is impoſſible to conceive: For he only takes care of the meaner and more ignoble Part in his Compoſition, but neglects the ſuperior and more exalted. Whereas the proper Life or Happineſs of any Creature conſiſts in a vigorous Exertion of all its Powers, and in applying them to the particular Uſes for which they were given, by making them ſubſervient and helpful to one another. And

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as Man is compoſed of two Parts, a Soul and a Body, the Powers of each muſt mutually be employ'd in order to advance the Happineſs of the whole Man, and to make him lead a Life ſuited to his Nature. For while the Body and its Gratifications are the ſole Object of his Care, the Soul and its intellectual Faculties muſt want their proper Enjoyments, muſt continue in a State of inactivity, and, as it were, Death; and conſequently, the better Part of the Man muſt be deprived of that Happineſs which is ſuited to his Nature.

Beſides, this Incapacity for Happineſs or ſpiritual Death, of which Sin is the Parent, not only attends the Sinner, while he continues in this World, but alſo accompanies him into the next. He has hitherto accuſtomed himſelf to no other Pleaſures but ſenſual ones, ſuch as are adapted to the Gratification of the Body; and is an entire Stranger to thoſe of a rational and ſpiritual Nature: And yet thoſe are the only Pleaſures which make up and conſtitute the Happineſs of Man in another World. So that when he paſſes into it, he will find himſelf utterly diſqualified for its Enjoyments, he will find himſelf dead to all the Pleaſures of it, and not meet with one Gratification there, that

can ſuit any of his Deſires. Thoſe Things which delighted his ſenſual Appetites he has left behind him; and as for thoſe Things which now offer themſelves to him, he can have no Reliſh for them: They are of too refined and ſpiritual a Nature for his depraved and vitiated Inclinations, and the whole Frame and Diſpoſition of his Mind is utterly averſe to them and bent againſt them. So that Miſery or Death is the natural Conſequence of Sin: For it diſables a Man from uſing in a proper Manner the ſeveral Powers and Faculties of which he is poſſeſs'd; and by that Means prevents him from anſwering the End of his Being, and of Courſe ſubjects him to Miſery, and incapacitates him for Happineſs.

Nor is this all: Beſides the natural Puniſhment conſequent upon Sin in a future State, there is likewiſe a *judicial* Puniſhment awaiting it, immediately ariſing from the ſole Deſignation and Appointment of God. For as eternal Life is promiſed in a Variety of Paſſages in the *New Teſtament* to the Godly and Obedient, ſo eternal Death or Miſery is threaten'd with no leſs Force and Clearneſs againſt the Wicked and Diſobedient. Theſe latter are not only to endure ſuch Pains as a Conſciouſneſs of Guilt, and a Want of Gratifications

tifications ſuited to their ſenſual Appetites would naturally create them, but they are alſo to be inflicted with a poſitive Puniſhment from the immediate Hands of the living God, a Puniſhment *exquiſite* in Degree, and *eternal* in Duration. Indeed the *Exquiſiteneſs* of the Puniſhment, ſuppoſing it to be temporal, moſt Men would have no Objection againſt; but the Eternity of it is what greatly alarms them, and appears to their ſhort-ſighted Reaſon to be inconſiſtent with the *Divine* Attributes of Mercy and Goodneſs. Yet ſince it is revealed to us in the Goſpel, and that Goſpel is certainly the Word of a Being, who is neither liable to be deceived himſelf nor capable of deceiving his Creatures, we had better ſubmit to what he has told us, than wantonly indulge ourſelves in cavilling and objecting. It is certainly time enough for us to diſpute the Propriety of it, when we can comprehend the Ways of an infinite God, all whoſe Ways are certainly equal; and managed, however we may fancy otherwiſe, according to the ſtricteſt Rules of Truth and Righteouſneſs. In the mean while it ought to ſatisfy us, that there appears nothing in this manner of Proceeding that is any way derogatory to the Divine Goodneſs. God gave Men a Liberty of acting, and a Power

of either uſing this Liberty aright, or of abuſing it. If they uſed it aright, he told them the Conſequence would be eternal Happineſs to them; if they abuſed it, eternal Miſery, ſo that it was entirely left to their own Choice, whether they would be eternally happy or eternally miſerable; and therefore whatever happens to be their Fate, muſt be owing to themſelves, to their own Doings.

'Tis true, it would be an Act of Mercy to Offenders themſelves, to mitigate or ſhorten their Miſery; but that it would be ſo to other moral and free Beings, who were Eye-witneſſes of ſo much Indulgence, is hardly probable. It would in all Likelihood be an Encouragement to ſuch to tranſgreſs the Will of their Creator, when they ſaw but a partial and temporary Puniſhment overtake Tranſgreſſors, when they ſaw at ſome particular Period of Duration a full Remittance granted them without any Expiation; which Remittance would probably remove the Reſtraints attending the Divine Laws, and introduce among Free-Agents an unbounded Licentiouſneſs of acting. However, waving ſuch Refinements, all that we know clearly of the Matter is, that the Scriptures have expreſsly revealed to us the Doctrine of eternal Puniſhments, which are threatened in the ſtrongeſt

ſtrongeſt Terms againſt all Ungodlineſs and Unrighteouſneſs of Men. It is certainly therefore our proper Buſineſs, without troubling ourſelves or others with Diſquiſitions that are too high for us, to take ſuch Courſes as may bid faireſt for avoiding them. And as the ſame Scriptures, which have revealed thoſe Puniſhments, have likewiſe pointed out to us the certain Means not only of eſcaping them, but alſo of enjoying eternal Happineſs, it muſt be our own Folly and Stupidity, if we do not, by ſuch Inſtructions, ſecure our everlaſting Intereſt. At leaſt thus much we may aſſure ourſelves, that, at the final Conſummation of all Things, God will equally be juſtified in the Condemnation of the Wicked, as in rewarding the Righteous; and that when the grand Drama of Providence ſhall be unfolded, it will appear before the Face of Men and Angels, that the Judge of all the Earth is righteous in all his Ways, as well as holy in all his Works. I proceed now,

II. To ſhew that eternal Life or Happineſs is a Thing of ſuch ineſtimable Value, as that nothing we can do, as that even perfect Obedience to the whole Law can by no Means merit it; and therefore we are to conſider it merely as the Gift of God: *The Gift of God*

is eternal Life. There is no Manner of Proportion betwixt an eternal Reward and the beſt and moſt perfect Services that Creatures can poſſibly pay to their Creator. Though they ſhould in every Inſtance obey his Will, and make it the invariable Rule of their Actions, the moſt that they could expect from ſuch Obedience would only be the Degree of Advantage that would naturally follow from it. They might reaſonably expect that their Piety, their Juſtice, their Charity, and their other moral, ſocial, and Chriſtian Virtues, would entitle them to ſome Reward, to ſuch a Reward as would ſufficiently compenſate their patient Continuance in well-doing; but could by no means expect that theſe Virtues would be an Equivalent to an Eternity of Bliſs. Or they might reaſonably hope, that ſince their Virtues in this Life were ſo far from being rewarded, that they were oftentimes the Occaſions of Sufferings and Diſtreſſes to them; there would be a future Retribution, when their unequal Treatment would be conſider'd, and their Condition would be better'd: But could never imagine that their moſt heroick Acts of Piety and Goodneſs could give them any juſt Title to eternal Happineſs. Beſides, the moſt perfect Obedience they could pay to the Will of their Creator, would be no

more than their Duty; and this they are obliged to perform, and God has a Right to demand from them, though no Reward at all ſhould be annexed to the Performance of it. Indeed God hath ſo ordered Matters, that our Duty and our Intereſt are connected with each other, and that the Obſervance of the former is generally the beſt Method of promoting the latter. And ſo far it may be ſaid, that a Reward attends the Performance of our Duty from the very Nature and Conſtitution of Things. But it does not follow, that becauſe our Duty is thus naturally rewarded, the Performance of it gives us any Title to that Reward. It only ſhews the Goodneſs of God in thus graciouſly contriving that our Duty and our Intereſt ſhould be the ſame, and that we ſhould be encouraged to practiſe the one, from the great Aſſurance we have of advancing, and even thereby ſecuring the other. That there is then any Benefit at all attending on our Obedience to the Divine Will, is not that our Obedience deſerves it; but is only an Argument of the Divine Bounty in freely beſtowing it. For we ſhould have been under the ſame Obligation as Creatures of paying that Obedience to our Creator, as if no Advantage had been conſequent upon it; nor could our Obe-

dience have given us any Right to demand that Advantage. And if the natural Reward, which ariſes from Obedience, be entirely a free Gift, and no ways due to us from the Nature of the Thing; much leſs can we lay Claim, on Account of any Obedience we can perform, to the Reward of eternal Life. For if our beſt Actions do not ſo much as merit the conſequent Reward that naturally attends them; there is not the leaſt Shadow of Reaſon to ſuppoſe, that they can of themſelves give us any ſort of Pretenſion to a future eternal one. So that upon the Suppoſition we could pay a perfect, unſinning Obedience to the whole Law of God, that Obedience would by no means give us any Title to an Eternity of Happineſs: It muſt even then be acknowledged as a Gift, and be reſolved into the Goodneſs and Beneficence of God.

But now in this our fallen State, when we are ſo far from paying a perfect Obedience to the divine Law, that we are guilty of many wilful and repeated Tranſgreſſions of it, and are every Day, nay every Hour offending God in various and numberleſs Inſtances; under ſuch unhappy Circumſtances, what poſſible Hopes can we have of obtaining any Reward; nay, what can we expect but a

a *certain fearful Looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation* which may ſpeedily devour us? If we had liv'd up to the divine Law in every Reſpect, we ſhou'd have had no Manner of Claim to eternal Life; how much leſs then, when we have wilfully and preſumptuouſly fallen ſhott of it? Can a Gift of ſuch ineſtimable Value be beſtowed upon Creatures who have render'd themſelves unworthy of the leaſt of God's Favours? Or can it be expected, conſiſtently with the Divine Juſtice and Holineſs, that the greateſt ſhou'd be vouchſafed them, while they continue ſo unworthy of it, ſo ſtained and polluted with Sin? It will be a ſufficient Anſwer to theſe Queſtions, if we ſhew,

III. That the Gift of eternal Life is made to us by God on Conſideration of the all-ſufficient Merits of his Son, our Saviour: *But the Gift of God is eternal Life, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.* Here eternal Life through Chriſt is ſet in Oppoſition to Death, which was introduced into the World by Sin; ſignifying to us, that though by our Tranſgreſſions we became ſubject to Death and Miſery, yet that the Guilt of our Tranſgreſſions wou'd be pardoned through the Merits of our Saviour, and we ſhou'd thereby be put in a Capacity of obtaining eternal Life and Happineſs. When Man had once ſinned,

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God's Juſtice required that he ſhou'd be puniſhed; but when by Virtue of that Attonement which Chriſt made for his Sin, the Guilt of it was expiated and the divine Juſtice ſatisfied, there was then a Diſcharge granted from the Puniſhment due to Sin, and the Sinner was admitted into Terms of Reconciliation and Acceptance. That Title to Life and Immortality, which we had forfeited through *Adam*, was graciouſly reſtored to us in Chriſt. For *as in* Adam *all die, even ſo in Chriſt ſhall all be made alive.* What we cou'd have had no Right to by the Performance of the moſt perfect Obedience, is now tender'd to us on much eaſier Conditions: The precious Blood of Chriſt waſhes out the Stains occaſioned by our Sins, and preſents us pure and immaculate before a Holy and Righteous God: We are reconciled to him by the Death of his Son, and he is pleaſed to receive us into his Favour, make us his Sons by Adoption, and Heirs of eternal Life, on the Score of what he did and ſuffered for our Sakes. And when we have the Righteouſneſs of Chriſt, who was without Sin, imputed to us; when we have a God incarnate intereſting himſelf in our Behalf, offering himſelf a propitiatory Sacrifice for us, dying in our Stead to take away

away our Guilt, and riſing again for our Juſtification; and when we have the ſame divine Perſon, who thus concerned himſelf for us in his State of Sufferings and Humiliation, aſcending into Heaven, and there interceeding for us as an Advocate; we cannot but have, upon theſe Conſiderations, the moſt comfortable Aſſurances, that God will be propitious to us, and that we ſhall not be given up to the Puniſhment naturally due to our manifold Offences.

Indeed the Divine Mercy towards us has even exceeded our greateſt Expectations. Through the Merits of Chriſt, God has promiſed us the Gift of eternal Life, which is a Reward that even perfect Obedience could not juſtly have claimed. The moſt that we could have expected upon the Performance of that, would only have been ſo much Pleaſure as would have naturally attended it: Whereas now, though we fall infinitely ſhort of perfect Obedience, we are nevertheleſs encouraged to hope for the exceeding great Reward of eternal Life. Our ſincere Endeavours after Obedience are the only Conditions required of us in order to the obtaining of it; and provided we perform theſe, every other Deficiency will be ſupplied from the inexhauſtible

hauſtible Fund of Chriſt's Merits, and from the powerful Aſſiſtances of God's Holy Spirit. So that the Satisfaction which *Chriſt* made for our Sins, has reconciled us to God; and it is in Conſideration thereof, that we are thought worthy of eternal Happineſs, upon the eaſy Terms of our endeavouring to attain it. In ſhort, though we are not able of ourſelves to perform perfect Obedience, yet, *through Chriſt ſtrengthening us*, we may perform ſuch Obedience, as, if we are not wanting to ourſelves, will be accepted of God, and entitle us to an *eternal Inheritance among them who are ſanctified through Faith.*

From what has been ſaid we may infer the Danger and Folly of Infidels, in rejecting the Goſpel Revelation, and the great Wiſdom Chriſtians ſhew, and the great Happineſs they enjoy, or at leaſt might enjoy, in believing it.

As for the Infidels, who reject the Goſpel Revelation, they diſclaim all Pretenſions to the Merits of a Saviour, and ſolely truſt to their own Merits in order to Forgiveneſs; and yet they cannot but be ſenſible that they have tranſgreſſed the divine Laws in many and repeated Inſtances; which Tranſgreſſions they muſt be likewiſe ſenſible will

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expoſe them to a Degree of Puniſhment proportionable to their Guilt: For, the *Wages of Sin is Death*; and as they cannot but acknowledge themſelves to have ſinned, they muſt have incurred the Penalty that is naturally due to Sin. They cannot think that Offences committed againſt a righteous and holy God can ever be pardoned, without ſome Satisfaction being made to the divine Juſtice. And yet, ſuch is the Obſtinacy and Folly of theſe Men, that they will not ſubmit to that Revelation, which provides for them ſuch a Satisfaction, but had rather run the Hazard of being eternally miſerable, than be indebted to the Merits of *Chriſt* for their Salvation, or acknowledge him to be their Saviour and Redeemer. And when Men thus deſpiſe the Method of Mercy, which is graciouſly tender'd to them in the Goſpel; and yet at the ſame Time have no Method ſo ſatisfactory, as *that* it preſcribes, to ſubſtitute in its Room; what can they expect but that they ſhou'd be puniſhed as their Folly deſerves. They know that every Tranſgreſſion of the divine Law ſubjects them to Puniſhment. They know that they have been guilty of many and repeated Tranſgreſſions; and yet when a Scheme of Mercy

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is contrived by God to reconcile them to him, notwithſtanding theſe Tranſgreſſions, they fooliſhly reject it, and chooſe rather, one wou'd think, to be miſerable in their own Way, than to be ſaved and made happy upon the eaſy Terms which God has propoſed to them.

Hence that hard Saying of our Saviour, ſo much found Fault with, *He that believeth not ſhall be damned*, is found to be reconcileable with Reaſon and the Nature of the Thing: For, if the *Wages of Sin is Death*, and, if *all have ſinned*, all who will not believe in *Chriſt*, and rely upon his Merits, muſt naturally become ſubject to the Penalty due to Sin. They cannot think that their own beſt Actions can merit any Reward; and as they refuſe a Reward offer'd them upon any other Conditions, though both it and the Conditions are offer'd them by God, they muſt neceſſarily expoſe themſelves to ſome Degree of Miſery; for God cannot, conſiſtently with his Juſtice and Holineſs, accept of a Creature ſtained and polluted with Sin, or admit him into Terms of Pardon and Forgiveneſs, without ſome proper Atonement for them; and, if when God hath provided ſuch an Atonement, Men re-

ject

ject the Benefit of it, they reject together with it the Means of their Salvation, and judge themſelves unworthy of eternal Life. They cannot be ſaved on the Score of their own Merits, and they will not be ſaved on the Score of *Chriſt*'s; ſo that by their own Obſtinacy and Unbelief, they cut themſelves off from the Hopes of Mercy in the Goſpel Covenant; and yet have no other Hopes upon which they can reſt with any Confidence and Aſſurance.

How much wiſer and happier are thoſe, who believe in *Chriſt* and the Redemption procured for them by his Blood? They take a Courſe which is clear of all Dangers and Difficulties: If they ſhou'd truſt to their own Merits, they find that theſe will entitle them to no Sort of Reward, inaſmuch as their beſt Actions have a great Alloy of Imperfection in them; but if they truſt to the Merits of their Saviour, theſe they are aſſured, for they have God's Word for it, will be imputed to them, and accepted on Condition of their ſincere Endeavours after Obedience. So that the Believer has none of thoſe Diſcouragements with Regard to his Acceptance with God, which embarraſs and perplex the Infidel's Mind, who knows that

that he hath tranſgreſſed the divine Law, and who likewiſe knows that every Tranſgreſſion of it ſubjects him to Puniſhment; and yet hath no Atonement that he can think of to remit the Puniſhment. For, though we have ſinned, yet *we have an Advocate with the Father Jeſus Chriſt the Righteous; and he is the Propitiation for our Sins.* Though we cannot perform perfect Obedience, yet we can perform ſuch Obedience as will entitle us through *Chriſt* to eternal Life and Happineſs.

Let us then do all that we can to ſerve and obey God, and we need not deſpair of obtaining his Favour, which is Life itſelf, but ſhall have all the Defects of our Services abundantly ſupplied from the all-ſufficient Merits of his Son our Saviour. And, though by reaſon of Man's firſt Tranſgreſſion, and the natural Conſequences attending it, we are incapacitated for performing the whole Will of God, and are thereby become obnoxious to the Puniſhment due to Sin; yet, ſo long as the Righteouſneſs of *Chriſt* and the Merits of his Sufferings are imputed to us, and ſo long as we are careful to perform the Conditions that are required of us, our

Sins,

Sins, which are many and great, ſhall be forgiven us, and we ſhall be entitled to as large a Share of Happineſs as if we had never offended: We ſhall then paſs through this World with Comfort and Satisfaction to ourſelves, from a Senſe of our being reconciled to God; and ſhall, when we leave it, be tranſlated into the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour *Jeſus Chriſt*, there to live and be happy with him to all Eternity.

SERMON XIII.

1 JOHN iv. 16.

—— God is Love.

THIS is a Truth which is wrote in very fair and legible Characters upon every Part of the viſible Creation. Whitherſoever we turn our Eyes, we perceive ourſelves ſurrounded with innumerable Expreſſions of the divine Bounty and Regard, and the whole Univerſe, as it were, diſplaying the Beneficence of it's Author. Look up to the Heavens, and behold the Effects of divine Love: Behold the Sun, that glorious Luminary, diffuſing the Rays of Light over the Face of the whole Earth, invigorating Nature by its ſalutary and benign Influence, and giving and continuing

the Powers of Life and Vegetation to Men and Beaſts, to Trees and Plants, and to the ſeveral Claſſes and Species of Creatures in this lower World: And behold in its Abſence the Moon enlightening by its borrowed Luſtre one Part or other of this Globe; the whole Canopy of Heaven ſet and beſpangled with an infinite Number of Stars, which ſerve to enliven the ſolemn Scene of Night; and all conſpiring to make this Earth an agreeable and proper Reſidence for the various Kinds of Inhabitants which are plac'd upon it: Not that we are to imagine the Love of God, which theſe Things loudly proclaim, is ſolely confined to this World, or that he created the Stars and Planets purely for our Uſe and Pleaſure; that cou'd only be the *ſecondary*, not the *primary* Intention of the Deity in creating them. Theſe are, no doubt, ſo many Worlds, which the wiſe and good Author of them, who never made any Thing ſuperfluous or in vain, hath furniſhed with their proper Inhabitants: For it wou'd be the higheſt Pride and Preſumption in us to imagine, that all other Parts of the Univerſe, except that Spot which we occupy and live upon, ſhou'd be entirely empty and a mere blank Space, and that the Author of numberleſs

Worlds

Worlds had no other Deſign in creating them, but that they ſhou'd be ſubſervient to, and anſwer the Conveniences of this Earth, which is only a Speck when compared with them. And it is likewiſe injurious to the Notions we have of the Deity, who, as far as we can judge, will ever be ready to communicate Life and Happineſs to as many Beings as poſſible, to ſuppoſe, that there ſhou'd be ſuch immenſe Spaces left without any Inhabitants, whoſe Conſtitutions were ſuited to their particular Situations. All the Parts of Matter with which we are acquainted, ſwarm with Creatures endued with Life; and we may fairly conclude from Analogy, that thoſe Parts, which we are not acquainted with, are not deſtitute of them. It raiſes our Idea of the divine Love and Goodneſs, to conſider, that the Mercies of God are thus eminently diſplayed over all his Works; and that, as he created vaſt Portions of Matter in the Immenſity of Space, ſo he has likewiſe furniſhed them with a great Variety of Inhabitants, who are capable of enjoying Life and Happineſs.

When we take a Survey of the Heavens, and behold amidſt ſuch an agreeable Variety, that beautiful Arrangement of Stars and Planets, which ſerves at once to give us a

delightful Proſpect, and to ſhed a ſalutary and benign Influence upon us; we cannot but acknowledge and admire the Love and Beneficence of their divine Author in thus making them inſtrumental to our Pleaſure and Benefit: But when we carry our Reflections further, and conſider them not only as a Means of our Welfare and Advantage, but alſo as ſo many Worlds, which are ſtock'd with their peculiar Inhabitants, all of which are made capable of ſuch a Share and Degree of Happineſs as is ſuited to their ſeveral Natures, and to their particular Rank and Situation in the Scale of Beings: In ſuch a View and Survey of Things, we have a much more extenſive Diſplay of the divine Love and Bounty, and from thence cannot but conclude, that as far as Creation reaches, there are the moſt eminent Manifeſtations of the Goodneſs of the Deity. How are our Notions of the divine Love and Beneficence enlarged, when we conſider that he has left no Part of the Univerſe in which he has not placed Creatures that are ſenſible of the Benefit of Exiſtence, and that may not by a proper Uſe of their natural Powers anſwer the End of their Being, which is Happineſs itſelf?

And

And if we deſcend from thoſe upper Regions of the Univerſe, which we are in a great Meaſure unacquainted with, to this lower World, we ſhall not want Inſtances of the divine Beneficence, but ſhall find clear and viſible Characters of it impreſs'd upon every Object that ſurrounds us. What can more eminently diſplay the Goodneſs of God, than the admirable Contrivance with which every Thing is diſpoſed in this Earth, towards promoting the Well-being and Happineſs of its ſeveral Inhabitants? The Air ſerves for them to breath in, and the Rain in Conjunction with it, are the Cauſes of Vegetation, by which the Earth becomes fruitful, and produces ſuch Things as are neceſſary for their Food and Nouriſhment. Even Storms and Hurricanes, though ſometimes attended with partial bad Conſequences, are, upon the whole, ſalutary and beneficial. They purge and purify the Air, and diſperſe thoſe noxious and peſtilential Vapours, which wou'd render it unfit for the Purpoſes of Reſpiration. The Mountains and riſing Grounds anſwer ſeveral very great and important Uſes: They break off the Force of the cold chilling Winds, by which the Valleys become more fertile, and the Creatures find a Shelter from the Inclemency of the

Weather: They likewiſe prevent the Waters from ſtagnating, and are, together with the ſpherical Form of the Earth, the Cauſe of their falling into Rivers. The Rivers in their Turn, beſides their being peculiarly adapted to the Life and Support of various Kinds of Fiſhes, are the Channels which convey to the Sea thoſe Waters that were originally derived from it, and keep up that conſtant Circulation of Vapours and Rain, which are abſolutely neceſſary to the Production and Nouriſhment of the vegetable and animal Creation. In ſhort, every Thing in this Earth is ſo manifeſtly ſuited to the Well-being and Convenience of its ſeveral Inhabitants, that cou'd we ſuppoſe any material Alteration to be made in it, ſome particular Species of Creatures wou'd thereby very ſenſibly ſuffer. And can any Thing then more evidently ſhew the Truth of my Text, That *God is Love*, than the particular Care he has taken, and the ſpecial Proviſion he has made, that nothing ſhould be wanting that might any Way contribute to the Well-being and Preſervation of the Creatures in this lower World: For all of them we find, upon the moſt accurate Obſervation, have ſuch Situations allotted them, as that without Difficulty they are ſufficiently pro-

provided with every Neceſſary and Conve-
nience.

But we need not go beyond ourſelves for Inſtances of God's Love and Tenderneſs: Man has abundantly experienced them, and ſtands, as it were, a Monument of the divine Goodneſs and Compaſſion. Every Moment of his Life from his Birth to his Death, he is beholden to his Maker for innumerable Bleſſings; and it is owing to nothing but the divine Bounty that he lives, thinks, and acts, that he is not reduced to his original Inſenſibility, or that he is not deprived of thoſe ſeveral rational and thinking Faculties which diſtinguiſh him from the Brute Creatures, and give him a glorious Pre-eminence over them. — It ſhall therefore be the Buſineſs of the remaining Part of this Diſcourſe,

I. To point out the ſeveral Acts of God's Love towards Mankind in creating, preſerving, and redeeming them.

II. What Sort of Behaviour ſuch Love demands from them. And,

I. I am to point out the ſeveral Acts of God's Love towards Mankind in creating, preſerving, and redeeming them. For ſurely there cannot be a more agreeable Employ-

ment

ment for Creatures who have had, and ſtill continue to have ſo many ſenſible Proofs of divine Love, than to reflect upon the various Inſtances of it, and to entertain their Minds with contemplating a Subject, in which they are ſo nearly intereſted, and from which all that they are, all that they have, and all that they hope for, is originally derived: For the Love of God is the Source from whence flows Life itſelf, and all the Comforts and Conveniencies of it, all the Means of Grace vouchſafed to us here, and the Hopes of Glory hereafter. And,

1ſt. The Love of God appears in creating us. That we were drawn into Being, and from ſtupid, inſenſible Matter, made capable of Life, and Senſe, and Motion, muſt entirely be reſolved into an Act of free Grace and Favour: For before we were made, and lay mix'd and blended with our native Duſt, there was nothing cou'd determine God to raiſe us out of it, and to make us living Souls, but his unlimited Goodneſs, which delights to communicate Being and Happineſs to as many Creatures as the Scale of Exiſtence can conveniently admit of. He cannot be ſuppoſed to have created us, or any other Beings with a View to the Advancement of his own Happineſs; for he is infinitely

infinitely happy in himself, and will continue to be ſo to all Eternity, though he ſhou'd be the only intelligent Being that exiſted in the Univerſe. His ſupreme Felicity is not at all affected by, nor receives Addition or Diminution from any Thing without him: And therefore the only View he cou'd have in creating us, muſt be his Deſire of making us happy. Even if he had wanted, that there ſhould be ſome Creatures that might be capable of admiring the Goodneſs and other Perfections of their all-wiſe Creator; yet this wou'd have been no Inducement to him to have created the human Race; inaſmuch as it is evident to all who acknowledge the Exiſtence of Angels and Spirits, that, before Man was made, there were ſeveral Sorts of Intelligences, who were fitted for the diſplaying the Glory, and ſetting forth the Praiſe of their benevolent Author. That we were then created at all can be aſcribed to no other Cauſe but the free and unlimited Goodneſs of God, which is ever diſpoſed to confer Exiſtence upon ſo many Creatures, as are capable of making the Sum-Total of their Happineſs exceed that of their Miſery.

And as it was owing to the Goodneſs of God, that we were created at all; ſo is it like-

likewiſe owing to the ſame Goodneſs, that we were created what we are, that is, Beings endued with Reaſon and Underſtanding, which enable us to diſtinguiſh betwixt Good and Evil; and a Freedom of Will, which leaves us at Liberty to chooſe what ſeems morally good to us, and to avoid what ſeems morally bad. For before we were put into Being, there cou'd be nothing in us that cou'd entitle us to a Rank in the Scale of Beings ſuperior to other Creatures. We ſhou'd have had no Room for Complaint had we been plac'd in their Situation, and they in ours; ſince, excluſive of the Will of God, we might as well have been made Worms as Men; we might as well have been under the Guidance of Inſtinct, as of Reaſon and Free-Will, and might as well have partook of the Natures of the Brutes, as of reaſonable, intelligent Creatures. It ſeem'd indeed neceſſary for the Preſervation of Order in the Univerſe, that there ſhou'd be a Subordination in the Scale of Beings, that after the moſt perfect Syſtem of Creatures was formed, there ſhou'd be Room for leſs perfect, and that from the higheſt Rank of created Beings, there ſhou'd be a gradual Deſcent from one Claſs to another, till it came to the very loweſt: But then what

Creatures

Creatures were to be ſuperior and what inferior in this wonderful Scale, was entirely owing to the divine Pleaſure. So that it was a mere Act of Love in the Deity, that we were raiſed to ſo high a Rank in the Univerſe, that we were poſſeſſed of Powers and Abilities, which give us a glorious Pre-eminence above every Creature around us, and that by Vertue of theſe ennobling Powers, we are made Lords, as it were, of this viſible Creation; have every Thing in Subjection under our Feet, and that, through the ſpiritual Part in our Compoſition, we claim Kindred with the Angels. — Nor,

2d. Does the Love of God leſs appear in preſerving us. Had we been left to ourſelves, after Creation, we ſhou'd have been as little able to have kept ourſelves in Being, as to have brought ourſelves into it: For the Act of Preſervation requires the ſame Power as the Act of Creation, and we muſt immediately have fallen into our original State of Inſenſibility, had we not graciouſly been upheld and ſupported by the aſſiſting Hand of God. If it was not for his good Providence, that *keepeth our Soul in Life*, and *ſuffereth not our Feet to ſlip* without his Permiſſion, we ſhou'd long before this have undergone a Diſſolution, our Bodies wou'd have mix'd with

with their native Dust, and the whole Man would have become as though he had never been. For, considering the nice and delicate Contexture of our Frame, how easily the Parts of it are displaced and put out of Order, and how, in consequence thereof, if *one Member suffers, all the Members suffer with it*, we must needs have died every Day, nay, every Moment since we were born, had not God as wonderfully preserved us, as we are *fearfully and wonderfully made*, and had not he manifested the same Love to us in our Preservation, as in our Creation.

Further, the Love of God is not only evident to us in his solely preserving us in Being, but also in that he has furnish'd us with Means, whereby we may make that Being comfortable to us, and contribute of ourselves to the Continuance of it. The divine Goodness hath plac'd us in such a Situation and Circumstances, as that we may be supplied, if we are not wanting to ourselves, with all the Necessaries and Conveniencies of Life. He hath liberally given us the Beasts of the Field, the Fowls of the Air, and the Fishes of the Sea, for our Use and Nourishment. For, as the Psalmist speaks, *he maketh the Grass to grow for the Cattle, and green Herb for the Service of Men; That he may bring Food out of the Earth, and*

Wine

Wine, that maketh glad the Heart of Man, and Oyl to make him a chearful Countenance, and Bread to strengthen his Heart. In a Word, all those Things that are necessary for the Support and Well-being of the other Creatures we partake of with them. The Air, and Water, the Mountains and Valleys, the Trees and Plants, which, with Blessings in common to all the Inhabitants of the Earth, are the Effects of the divine Bounty, and Marks of that Love and Affection, which he bears to us: for without these we should not only be destitute of the Pleasures of Life, but also of the Supports of it, of Food and Raiment. And therefore, that we either enjoy Life at all, or attended with such Blessings as are fitted to make it agreeable, is entirely owing to that gracious Supply, which the bountiful Author of Nature hath liberally provided.

But the most astonishing Instance of God's Love appears,

3dly, In his redeeming us from Sin, and from the dreadful Consequences which wou'd have naturally awaited it. Immediately upon Man's being created, the Observance of one single Command was the whole of his Duty; on Condition that he kept *that* inviolate, and preserved his Innocence, God graciously promised him the Reward

ward of Life and Immortality; but if he abuſed his Free Will, and heedleſly tranſgreſſed it, Death both temporal and eternal was to be his Portion, and the Effects of that Tranſgreſſion were likewiſe to deſcend upon his lateſt Poſterity. Man, through the Suggeſtions and Artifice of Satan, is guilty of this Tranſgreſſion, forfeits his Innocence, with the Privileges annexed to it, and, of Courſe, expoſes himſelf to the Anger and Reſentment of his offended Maker. Here the divine Love intereſts itſelf in his Behalf, and graciouſly interpoſes to ſoften the Rigour of the divine Juſtice. Terms of Mercy and Reconciliation are intimated to him and his Deſcendants immediately upon the Fall, by the Promiſe then made, that the *Seed of the Woman ſhou'd bruiſe the Serpent's Head*. This Promiſe was further illuſtrated and confirmed by the Inſtitution of Sacrifices, and other Types and Prophecies, all of which pointed out and prefigured ſome future Atonement for Sins, and encouraged Men to hope, that through that Atonement, their ſincere Endeavours after Obedience to the divine Laws, wou'd graciouſly be accepted. Accordingly, when the Fulneſs of Time was come, all the Prophecies and Predictions, which were made both before and under the Law,

Law, were exactly fulfilled. God, to ſatisfy the Hopes and Expectations of Mankind, and to reſcue their Minds from the deſponding Thoughts, with which they long had been perplexed and harraſs'd about their Repentance being accepted, ſends his Son, the promiſed Seed, into the World, to redeem them from Sin and eternal Death, and to put them in a Capacity, if they were not wanting to themſelves, of working out their own eternal Salvation. And is not this a moſt aſtoniſhing Diſplay of the divine Love to Mankind! When by their wilful Diſobedience they had offended their Maker, and were thereby become obnoxious to his ſevereſt Diſpleaſure, that he ſhou'd then commiſerate their Caſe ſo far, as to contrive a Method for their Redemption and Recovery, is an Act of the moſt unparallel'd, amazing Goodneſs. We think it an Inſtance of great Love and Affection to lay down our Life for our Friend, *(for greater Love hath no Man than this, that he ſhou'd lay down his Life for his Friend,)* but what is ſuch Love when compared with the Love of God, who ſent his Son into the World to die for his very Enemies: *For while we were Enemies, Chriſt died for us:* While we were Rebels and Traytors to our God, and were guilty

of many wilful, notorious Violations of his ſacred Laws; he even then vouchſafed to part with the Son of his Boſom, ſent him into a World, where he met with the moſt cruel and barbarous Treatment from thoſe Men whom he *came to ſeek and to ſave*, and at laſt ſuffered from their Hands, though for their Sakes, a moſt painful and ignominious Death. Stand confounded, ſinful Man, at the great Love of thy God and Saviour, and at thy own ſhameful, baſe Ingratitude! Let a Senſe of this their Love and thy own Ingratitude, be always a powerful Motive with thee to behave as the *Redeemed of the Lord*, as one who hath received ſo much from thy Maker's Bounty; and yet, Ingrate that thou art! haſt deſerved ſo very little. — Which leads me to ſhew,

II, And by way of Application, what Sort of Behaviour the Love of God to Mankind, diſplay'd in ſo many Inſtances of Mercy and Beneficence, does juſtly demand from them.

And, the leaſt that it requires of us, is, that we ſhou'd in Return love him. Now the only true Way of expreſſing this our Love to him, is, by keeping his Commandments. In vain do we pretend that we love God for his manifold Goodneſs towards us, while

while we allow ourſelves in the wilful and habitual Neglect of any of his Laws: For the natural Effect of ſuch Love is Obedience, and without it is nothing but downright Diſſimulation. We ſhou'd think that Son took a very prepoſterous Method of ſhewing his Love to his Father, who ſhou'd run counter to his expreſs Orders in every material Action of his Life, and ſhou'd only pay a ceremonious Reſpect to him with regard to Matters of a comparatively trifling inſignificant Nature: And yet this is the Method, which too many, I fear, take of ſhewing their Love to God, their heavenly Father. They can attend his Worſhip and ſay their Prayers, and be mighty exact in the outward Acts of Devotion; which are certainly Duties that ought to be performed, and that too with Seriouſneſs and Reverence; but yet, when this Fit of Devotion is over, can return with the greateſt Calmneſs to their former Sins, and be very well ſatisfied from this partial Performance of their Duty, that they bear a true Love to God.

It is ſurprizing to think what ſtrange unaccountable Cheats Men put upon themſelves with Regard to this one Point of loving God. Some think that they love him by hating themſelves, by emaciating and enfeebling

feebling their Bodies through immoderate Abſtinence and Faſting, and other ſevere Acts of Penance; and yet, at the ſame Time, do not ſcruple to be guilty of notorious Tranſgreſſions of his expreſs Laws.

Others again think, that to love God is to be always upon their Knees, and at their Devotions, and that they are entirely to throw off all Care and Concern for the Things of this World; little conſidering, that while they are in this World, it is their Duty ſo far to mind the Affairs of it, as to provide for themſelves and their Families, and not to let Religion deſtroy their Humanity, or make them forget that they are Men.

And others, obſerving the Perfidy, Falſhood, and Injuſtice that abound in the World, retire out of it in a Kind of Pett, betake themſelves to Solitude, and cut themſelves off from all human Converſe and Society, that they may be, as they pretend, more at Liberty to ſerve their Maker, and that their Love of Man may be entirely loſt and ſwallowed up in their Love of God. But ſuch Ways of loving God as theſe are only a ceremonious Kind of mocking him: We muſt make the Love of God, the Love of ourſelves, and the Love of our Neighbour, fall in and be conſiſtent with each other;

other-

otherwiſe we love none of them as we ought, or as Heaven requires. If our going to Church, and attending upon divine Worſhip, does not make us better Men when we are abſent from it, does not make us better Parents, better Maſters, and better Friends, we may think that ſuch outward Acts of Religion are Marks of our loving God, but ſhall find they will be eſteemed otherwiſe in the Sight of him, who *judgeth not according to the outward Appearance, but judgeth righteous Judgment.* Or, if we are ſo intent upon religious Duties, as to neglect the Duties which we owe to our Fellow-Creatures, or if we make our ſerving God a Pretence for our being uſeleſs to Society, nay, of being cruel and inhuman to Man, we may call this, if we pleaſe, a loving God, but ſhall certainly find the ſame Effects from ſuch Love, as if we hated him with the moſt bitter Hatred.

If, laſtly, we withdraw ourſelves from the World, and ſhut up ourſelves in a Cloyſter, from a Pretence of being more at Leiſure for the Service of our Maker, and by that Means put it out of our Power to perform the active and ſocial Duties, which are the moſt ſubſtantial Duties of all, we may ſay, that the Love which we

bear to God induc'd us to the Choice of this indolent Way of Living; but it is much to be feared we were ſwayed to it by a much more baſe and ignoble Motive: For the beſt Way of ſhewing our Love to God is by doing good to Man; and how can we give any Signs of ſuch Love, when we in a great Meaſure are deprived of the Opportunities of benefitting Mankind. And, therefore, to conclude; if we wou'd love God as we ought, we muſt keep all his Commandments, without Exception: We muſt be conſtant in the Practice of all divine, human, and ſocial Virtues, and not think of ſeparating in our Behaviour what God has joined together in his Law. By thus loving God we ſhall entitle ourſelves to his *Favour and Loving Kindneſs, which is better than Life itſelf*, while we continue in this World; and ſhall, when we leave it, be admitted into his Kingdom of Glory and Happineſs, through the Merits and Mediation of *Chriſt* our Saviour, To whom with the Father and the Holy Spirit, &c.

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SERMON XIV.

Job xxii. 21.

Acquaint now thyſelf with Him, and be at Peace.

IGnorance of God and his Atributes hath ever been the Parent of all thoſe Uneaſineſſes, and anxious Diſquietudes, which have diſturbed the Breaſts of Men upon taking a Survey of the ſeeming Irregularities and Evils, that every where occurred to them, both in the natural and moral World. Partial Miſchiefs frequently happening both in the *one* and the *other*, without any apparent good Deſign in them, are inexplicable Difficulties to many, and greatly puzzle and perplex their thinking Faculties, their Reaſon and Underſtanding. Whether they turn their Eyes upwards to the Heavens, or downwards to the Earth, they meet with innumerable Things they

cannot account for. The baneful Influence of the Stars, the diſmal Effects of Thunder and Lightning, noxious and peſtilential Vapours, which are big with the Seeds of Diſeaſes and Death, and various other Appearances, that carry along with them an Air of ſomething ſhocking and cruel, have been made ſo many Objections againſt God's Government of the natural World, and have become Matter of Diſquiet and Complaint to ſhort-ſighted Mortals.

Nor have they been leſs diſturbed in their Minds by his Conduct in the moral World. They are diſpleaſed at him that he ſhould permit any ſuch Thing as a Poſſibility of moral Evil, when he knew Men would certainly be guilty of it, that he ſhould give them a Liberty of acting, when he knew they would act amiſs; and, what hath given Occaſion to ſeveral well-meaning Men, in almoſt every Age, to arraign his Providence, that he ſhould make no viſible Difference betwixt thoſe who uſed this Liberty aright, and thoſe who abuſed it. On theſe and many more Accounts have Men diſquieted themſelves in vain; have cavilled and found Fault with the ſeemingly unequal Diſpenſations of Providence, though this Inequality is not in the Diſpenſations themſelves, but in their

their partial Manner of judging of them, they have charged God foolishly and blasphemously, for no other Reason, one would think, but only because he hath not condescended, in his Ways of acting, to stoop to their narrow Comprehensions, and to make their finite and limited Understandings capable of taking in an infinite unlimited Scheme of Things; which is an absolute Impossibility, and implies in the Terms a flat Contradiction.

Now an Acquaintance with God, a Knowledge of his Nature and Attributes, a competent Share of which every one by a due Use of Reason and the Scriptures, may easily attain, will infallibly remove all those Difficulties and Disquietudes, which perplex and harrass Men's Minds, and bring them to a State of Acquiescence and Rest, as to all the Divine Proceedings. *Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at Peace.* In discoursing upon these Words, I shall,

I. Enquire, What it is to be acquainted with God. And,

II. How such an Acquaintance can make us easy and at Peace, with Regard to whatever happens around us.

I. I am

I. I am to enquire, What it is to be acquainted with God; and to trace out the ſeveral Steps we muſt take, in order to arrive at a ſatisfactory Knowledge of him. Now natural Reaſon, aſſiſted by Divine Revelation, brings us to be ſo far acquainted with God, as that we know him to be a Being poſſeſſed of all poſſible Perfections; a Being of infinite Power, Wiſdom, and Goodneſs; the Author and Maker of all Things, both viſible and inviſible; who hath nothing prior to him, but is from all Eternity, and will be to all Eternity, in and of himſelf. This then is the firſt Step towards our Acquaintance with God; namely, our knowing him to be a Being of abſolute Perfection; and from thence we are naturally let into a more enlarged Knowledge of him, with Regard particularly to his Dealings with Men. If he is a Being infinitely powerful, he muſt be able to do, without any Controul, whatever he pleaſes; ſo that we may ſafely put ourſelves under his Protection. And whatever he pleaſes to do, is certainly moſt juſt and equitable to be done; becauſe a Being that is infinitely powerful, can have no Inducement to do what is wrong or unjuſt; ſince no Being would do an unjuſt Thing was it but in his Power to accompliſh his Purpoſes

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by fair and juſt Methods. Abſolute Power then is nothing but abſolute Juſtice; and it is always the Want of it, or ſome Degree of Impotence, that can tempt any Being to do what is wrong. So that from knowing God to be a Being infinitely powerful, we likewiſe collect that he is a Being infinitely juſt, and conſequently have Reaſon to acquieſce in all his Determinations.

If again God is a Being that is infinitely wiſe, he will undoubtedly order and diſpoſe every Thing in the wiſeſt and moſt prudent Manner. For as he knows all the poſſible Contingencies of Things, all the mediate and immediate Cauſes of the moſt diſtant and ſeemingly improbable Effects, and can manage Matters ſo, as that all ſhall upon the whole terminate in the general Good, we may be very ſure that in the laſt Reſult of Things, thoſe Diſpenſations of Providence, which appeared intricate and perplexed to us, will unravel themſelves to our entire Satisfaction. 'Tis no Wonder that ſhort-ſighted Mortals, who can only ſee ſome broken, detached Parts of the Univerſe, ſhould be at a Loſs in accounting for ſeveral Appearances in Nature, ſince they are in the main ignorant of the Relations which one Part bears to another; of the nice Connexions,

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ſtrong Dependencies, and juſt Gradations, by which a beautiful Uniformity of Deſign is kept up, and by which is maintained the Order and Harmony of the whole. But then if we conſider on the other Hand, that an infinitely wiſe God is the Conductor and Manager of this wonderful and complicated Scheme of Things, that the whole Chain of Cauſes and Effects is in his unerring Hands, and that nothing can happen beyond the Reach of his Knowledge; we may from thence modeſtly preſume, that whatever is, is right upon the whole; and that whatever is permitted to be done, though evil in itſelf, is permitted to prevent ſome greater Evil. Man, like a critick Fly, who ſhould preſume to tax a grand, magnificent Building, from ſeeing only ſo ſmall a Part of it as his ſhort-ſighted Eye could take in, may ignorantly and preſumptuouſly condemn the vaſt and amazing Fabrick of the Univerſe; but God the Architect, who formed and contrived it, ſees it in a larger and more comprehenſive View. He perceives the Uſe of it, and obſerves the Subſerviency of one Part to another, and how all is adapted to promote the greateſt poſſible Good, and thereby to anſwer his benevolent Intention of making the Good preponderate the Evil. Thus far ſhall

our Acquaintance with God be cultivated, by our knowing him to be a Being of infinite Wiſdom.

And if we further conſider him under the amiable Character of a Being infinitely good, we may reaſonably expect that nothing will be with-held from his Creatures, that can any way contribute towards promoting their Happineſs. It cannot indeed be ſuppoſed that the Happineſs of Individuals ſhould always be provided for; becauſe it may ſometimes be inconſiſtent with the Wiſdom and Juſtice of the Deity, that it ſhould be ſo. For the whole may ſuffer, by a partial Regard to the Welfare of Particulars; and when this is the Caſe, it would be ſo far from being an Inſtance of Goodneſs, to favour a few to the manifeſt Detriment and Prejudice of many, that it would rather be an Inſtance of Cruelty, and would argue too much of the Weakneſs frequently incident to earthly Parents, who ſuffer their Affections to be engroſſed by favourite particular Children, to the total Neglect and Diſregard of all the reſt. But the Mercy and Goodneſs of the Deity are eminently diſplay'd over all his Works. He does not ſuffer himſelf to be influenced by a partial Fondneſs in his Diſtributions of Good and Evil, but always contrives

tives that the Sum-total of Happineſs to the whole ſhould more than counterballance that of Miſery, and had rather a few Individuals ſhould be hardly dealt with, than that a more general Good ſhould be thereby prevented. For God orders Matters ſo, as that even by the Permiſſion of partial Evil, there is a conſiderable Increaſe of Good; that is, there is more Good redounds to the World by the Permiſſion of it, than if it had never been permitted at all.

It muſt however be obſerved, that with Reſpect to Men, when God permits Evil to befall his Favourites, it is only his Manner of Dealing with them while they continue in this World. It is either by way of trying their Virtue, in order to qualify them for a more exalted Degree of Happineſs; or it is to preſerve the Order and Harmony of the Univerſe, which probably would be diſturbed by frequent and conſtant Interpoſals of the Divine Providence in their Behalf. The Goodneſs and Juſtice of God are both concerned however to ſee that the Virtuous and Deſerving be rewarded and made happy at one Time or other, either ſooner or later; if not in this Life, yet certainly in the next. For though there may be wiſe and good Reaſons, why they ſhould undergo preſent

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Hardſhips and Difficulties, yet none can be aſſigned, why they ſhould undergo them *always*. Theſe Reaſons muſt ceaſe, as ſoon as they quit this World and ſtep into Eternity. If they are afflicted here, it is for their Good; God has gracious Intentions to ſerve upon them, as well by his ſevereſt as mildeſt Diſpenſations; and it muſt be owing to ourſelves, to our own Stupidity and Folly, that we are made miſerable in the laſt Reſult of Things. In ſhort, from knowing that God is infinitely good, we know that he will do nothing but what is beſt and moſt expedient to be done; that his whole Conduct will be influenced by the Law of Kindneſs and Benevolence, and that we ſhall one Day have Reaſon to acknowledge him *the Father of Mercies and God of all Comfort*; our Benefactor and Friend, who in all his Dealings towards us conſults our Good.

Thus, you ſee, what it is to be acquainted with God, and what Steps we muſt take in order to gain this Acquaintance. We firſt find out by Reaſon and Revelation, what he is in himſelf; namely, a Being of infinite Perfection; And from knowing this, we know him to be a Being of infinite Power, Wiſdom, and Goodneſs. Hence we are led on to diſcover what he is to us, and what

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Behaviour we may expect from him as ſuch. If he is infinitely powerful, there is nothing but what he is able to do for us; and he will do nothing but what is moſt juſt and equitable to be done; becauſe infinite Power is infinite Juſtice, ſince it is only the Want of Power that can tempt any Being to do what is wrong. If he is infinitely wiſe, he will apply his Power to the beſt Advantage, and make every Thing ſubſervient to the Happineſs of his Creatures. And if he is infinitely good, he will always be ready and diſpoſed to promote their Happineſs, and uſe all poſſible Means whereby they may attain it. In a Word, one infinite Perfection includes in it all other Perfections; for to be infinitely perfect in one Reſpect is to be perfect in every other Reſpect; ſince abſolute Perfection cannot be divided without being deſtroy'd. And therefore when we ſay that God is abſolutely perfect, we ſay likewiſe that he is infinitely powerful, infinitely wiſe, infinitely good, and poſſeſs'd of every Property, that can poſſibly be attributed to the moſt perfect of Beings. Conſequently when we ſay that he is the moſt perfect of Beings, we ſay that we ſhall be treated by him as his Creatures, in the beſt and moſt reaſonable Manner. In the Knowledge of all theſe Particulars does

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our Acquaintance with God conſiſt. I ſhall therefore proceed,

II. To enquire, How ſuch an Acquaintance can make us eaſy and at Peace. *Acquaint thyſelf with him, and be at Peace.* Let us here take a View of the ſeveral Attributes of the Deity with which we have got acquainted, and then we ſhall ſee, how both conſidered ſeparately and together, they lay a ſure Foundation for Comfort and Satisfaction of Mind, and ſpeak Peace to the Soul amidſt the various Diſtreſſes and Difficulties of Life. If we view God as a Being infinitely powerful, we have nothing to fear from outward Diſaſters and Accidents; but may be eaſy and reſigned while we know that we are under his almighty Protection. No Evil can come upon us, which infinite Power cannot eaſily ward off, and open to us a Way of delivering ourſelves from.

Man indeed conſidered in himſelf, and without the Aſſiſtance of an almighty Protector, would be in a moſt helpleſs, deplorable Condition; he would continually be left naked, and expoſed to innumerable Dangers and a thouſand Deaths. He would every Moment have Reaſon to be terrified and affrighten'd with the moſt dreadful, diſquieting Apprehenſions. Even imaginary Evils

would create him Uneaſineſs, inaſmuch as Fancy would paint them more ſtrong and affecting than if they were real. For Fear is very ingenious in contriving itſelf Matter to work upon, eſpecially when we have no Conſideration left, that can any way ſupport or relieve us under it. But theſe Fears and Diſquietudes muſt immediately vaniſh, when we come to reflect, that we are under the Care and Inſpection of an all-powerful Being, who can extricate us out of Difficulties when we leaſt expect a Deliverance, and can find out a Way to eſcape them, when our Caſe appears deſperate. Are any poor and needy, and even brought to the deplorable Neceſſity of either begging or ſtarving? God is able to raiſe them up Friends, who ſhall pity their Wants, and bring them a comfortable Relief. Or if they ſhould be diſregarded by their Fellow-Creatures in ſuch Circumſtances of Diſtreſs, God can help them in another Way. He can give them ſuch plentiful Supplies of his Grace, as may enable them to bear reſolutely up under them, with Patience and Reſignation to the Divine Will; wiſely improving Afflictions into a Means of promoting their everlaſting Salvation. Are any ſick almoſt unto Death? God is able either to reſtore to them Health,

Health, or make all their Bed eaſy to them in their Sickneſs, by giving them ſuch a Share of Conſtancy and Courage, as that they will even dare to look Death in the Face without Terror or Amazement; to conſider him not as an Enemy, but as a Friend and Deliverer, who comes to releaſe them out of all their Troubles, and to tranſlate them to a Place of Happineſs and Reſt, *where Sorrow, and Crying, and Death ſhall be no more.* In ſhort, are any of us preſſed down with Affliction and Adverſity of any Sort? A Being of infinite Power is able to ſupport our drooping Spirits under them, to make our Iſſue out of them happy and comfortable, and to convert them into a Means of working out for us a *far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.* So that, while we know that God is a Being of infinite Power, we need not be diſturbed at what happens around us, but may have Recourſe to his gracious Aſſiſtance in all Emergences, and then he will deliver us to our entire Satisfaction.

Again, If we conſider God as a Being infinitely wiſe, we have great Reaſon to acquieſce in all his Diſpenſations, as knowing that he will do nothing but what is beſt and fitteſt to be done; nothing but what we

ourſelves would acknowledge to be ſo, were we only acquainted with what is for our Intereſt. We ſhould indeed have Reaſon to be uneaſy in our Minds, were we left to the Management and Diſpoſal of ourſelves; for then we ſhould often, on Account of our Ignorance and ſhort-ſightedneſs, be drawn into inextricable Difficulties and Troubles; we ſhould often chooſe, and even covet after ſuch Things, as would, if they were granted, prove prejudicial to us, and even bring us to Ruin. The Misfortune is, we do not know what is beſt and moſt expedient for us; and therefore, 'tis no wonder, that we ſhould be often led to make an abſurd, diſadvantageous Choice, ſuch a Choice as we may have Reaſon to repent all our Lives after. It is much better and happier for us, that we ourſelves and our Affairs are lodged in the Hands of God, whoſe unerring Wiſdom will direct him how to make all Things work together for our final Good.

Are there Difficulties in the natural World, which we cannot account for? Theſe may be Difficulties to our finite Underſtandings, but cannot be ſo to an infinite God, whoſe Works are all conducted by infinite Wiſdom. Let us not preſume to fathom the Depths of the Divine Proceedings by the ſhort and imper-

imperfect Line of our Reaſon, but let us take it for granted, that though they are incomprehenſible to us, they are nevertheleſs wiſe and reaſonable in themſelves. Vain and preſumptuous Man dares to find Fault with the Ways of an all-wiſe God, becauſe he does not underſtand the particular Reaſons of them. But is this a Reaſon why he ſhould blame them? Is it not rather a Reaſon why he ſhould be humble and modeſt, ſhould confeſs his own Weakneſs, and make this modeſt Acknowledgment, That though Man is a Fool, yet God is wiſe; that all his Works are the Works of infinite, unerring Wiſdom, and that the only Reaſon why he does not ſee the Propriety of them, is his Ignorance and Short-ſightedneſs.

The ſame may be obſerved with Regard to the Difficulties of God's Conduct in the moral World. They may all be reſolved into his infinite Wiſdom; a due Conſideration of which, will make us eaſy and at Peace about them; and rather truſt to *that* for the Management of Things, which we do not underſtand, than venture to take the Management of them into our own Hands. For it ſeems that to reaſon right in Caſes of ſo arduous and intricate a Nature, is always to ſubmit. In ſhort, it is enough for our

Comfort and Satisfaction, that we are aſſured, that all the Affairs of the World are under the Diſpoſal of an all-wiſe God, who will always conſult the Welfare of the whole, though ſometimes to the Prejudice of Particulars, while in this World; but will certainly take Care that all ſhall be dealt with by an impartial Diſtribution of Juſtice in the World to come. This we may expect, not only as he is an infinitely wiſe and juſt God, but alſo as he is an infinitely good Being. For an infinitely good Being will naturally be inclined to employ both his Power and his Wiſdom in promoting the Welfare and Happineſs of his Creatures. He will be diſpoſed to employ his infinite Power to protect and preſerve us, to relieve us in our Diſtreſſes, and to ſupply our Wants; and his infinite Wiſdom to direct his Power in ſuch a Manner, as may beſt anſwer his benevolent Intention towards us, and beſt forward us in the Way to Happineſs. In ſhort, a ſure Foundation for Peace is laid in our Acquaintance with God, in a Knowledge of his Nature and Attributes, as we have hitherto conſidered them. They all, ſeparately taken, afford a ſufficient Ground-Work of Peace and Confidence; and when taken together, are an Anchor of the Soul ſure and ſtedfaſt, which

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ſecures us from being toſs'd about and diſturb'd with the tempeſtuous Waves of a troubleſome World.

After all it muſt be remembered, that a bare ſpeculative Acquaintance with God, with his Nature and Attributes, is not ſufficient to procure us Peace, ſo long as we do not ſuffer it to influence our Practice. It is a practical Acquaintance with God, ſuch an Acquaintance with him as makes us truly religious, that is intended in the Text, and which I have all along intended. For let a wicked and irreligious Man be never ſo much acquainted with God in Theory, let him be able to diſpute never ſo learnedly about his Nature and Attributes, yet while he does not make it ſubſervient to the Practice of his Duty, it will by no Means contribute to the Peace and Satisfaction of his Mind. Nay, ſo far otherwiſe, that it will rather contribute to his Uneaſineſs and Trouble. For when he is acquainted that God is a Being of infinite Power, Juſtice and Goodneſs, can he help being uneaſy in himſelf when he reflects that he hath offended that God by diſregarding his Power, deſpiſing his Juſtice, and abuſing his Goodneſs? Can he go on in diſobeying his Commands without any Senſe

of Guilt or Compunction of Mind, when he knows that all the Divine Attributes are obliged, as it were, to bring him to Puniſhment for ſuch Diſobedience? For it is the Man only that uniformly and conſtantly ſerves and obeys him, that can have any Peace from an Acquaintance with him. Such an one will put himſelf under the Protection of his Power, admire his Wiſdom, acquieſce in his Juſtice, and rely upon his Goodneſs; and ſuch a Situation and Diſpoſition of Mind will make him direct all his Endeavours to live agreeably to his Will, to procure his Favour and Acceptance, which will be the greateſt Happineſs to him, both in this World and alſo in the next.

And therefore, to conclude, Be it your Care, to inform yourſelves of that Being whoſe Creatures you are, and to whom, as ſuch, you are under an Obligation of performing a becoming Service. Let his infinite Power make you afraid of offending him, by tranſgreſſing his Laws; let his infinite Wiſdom move you to acquieſce in all his Diſpenſations; and let his infinite Goodneſs, ſo remarkably intereſted in your Behalf, lead you to Repentance and Amendment of Life. In a Word, acquaint your-

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ſelves with his Divine Will, as it is revealed to you in the holy Scriptures: Make *that* the Rule of your Actions, and let your Endeavours, in Conformity thereto, be ſincere and vigorous, and not influenced by any ſiniſter ungenerous Motives. Thus ſhall you paſs through Life with Peace and Satisfaction to yourſelves; and that Acquaintance with God which was begun upon Earth, ſhall be perfected and compleated in Heaven, by being admitted there into the Preſence and Enjoyment of the ſupreme and ſovereign Good to all Eternity. Into which that we may all be admitted, God of his infinite Mercy grant, *&c.*

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SERMON XV.

On Chriſtmas-Day.

LUKE ii. 14.

Glory to God in the Higheſt, and on Earth Peace, Good-will towards Men.

THIS was the Anthem, ſhort but comprehenſive, which was ſung in joyful Concert by the heavenly Quire, upon the Nativity of our bleſſed Saviour. Thoſe benevolent Spirits, the Angels, rapt and tranſported at an Event by which Mankind would be ſo much benefitted, could not but break out into Strains of the warmeſt Gratitude to that gracious Being, who was the Author of it; and alſo congratulate their Fellow-Creatures, before in a forlorn, deſponding Condition, upon the Means offered them of effecting their

Recovery

Recovery through the Perſon then born. They congratulated them upon the long-expected Appearance of the Meſſiah; of Him, whom the Prophet calls *The Deſire of all Nations*; in whoſe Life they would find a moſt perfect Pattern of all moral and ſocial Virtues; whoſe Doctrines would breath nothing but the pureſt Strains of Piety and Devotion, would recommend nothing but Love and Charity, Juſtice and Equity; and every good Diſpoſition, that could adorn human Nature, or tend to the general Welfare and Happineſs of the World. By whoſe Death and Paſſion an Attonement would be made for their Tranſgreſſions, and their ſincere, though imperfect, Endeavours after Virtue and Holineſs, would be accepted and rewarded. By whoſe Reſurrection they would be juſtified, or accounted righteous in the Sight of God, notwithſtanding the Defects of their beſt Services; and by whoſe Aſcenſion into Heaven, the Merits of all that he did or ſuffered while upon Earth, would be pleaded in their Behalf before his Father. In ſhort, the heavenly Hoſt praiſed God, and congratulated Men, upon the Birth of that divine Perſon, who wrought and completed our Redemption, and who thereby advanced the Glory of God, and promoted among

Men

Men that Peace and friendly Agreement, that Charity and univerſal Benevolence, which ought to be the diſtinguiſhing Characteriſtic of thoſe who call themſelves Chriſtians, *Glory to God in the Higheſt, and on Earth Peace, Good-will towards Men.* In diſcourſing further upon which Words, we ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

I. That the Glory of God was never more ſignally diſplayed than in the Nativity of our bleſſed Saviour, and in the Redemption which was wrought for us by him. And,

II. That every Thing that he *did* and *ſuffered*, while dwelling among us, had a manifeſt Tendency to promote *Peace on Earth, and Good-will towards Men.*

I. We are to ſhew, That the Glory of God was never more ſignally diſplayed than in the Nativity of our bleſſed Saviour, and the Redemption which was wrought for us by him. Among the ſerious and more conſiderate Part of Mankind, thoſe of their own Species are always reckoned to have the beſt Title to Glory, who have given the moſt remarkable Inſtances of Goodneſs in their Actions and Behaviour. A Character, let

let it be never ſo ſtriking in other Reſpects, will ever be eſteemed baſe and infamous, if it wants this amiable and moſt ennobling Quality to adorn and ſet it off.

Now, if according to human Eſtimation of Things, true Glory can only belong to the Good; and if it be generally allowed, that Men are honoured and reſpected in Proportion as they have deſerved more or leſs well of the World, by Acts of Kindneſs and Beneficence; how great and truly glorious muſt that Being appear, both to Angels and Men, who contrived a Method to ſave the whole human Race, after they had, by their wilful Diſobedience, ſubjected themſelves to Death and Miſery. When Man had once ſinned, Juſtice required that he ſhould be puniſhed; yet notwithſtanding this, God was ſo gracious, as to offer Terms of Reconciliation and Acceptance to the Sinner upon his Repentance, and to receive him into Favour and Mercy, in Conſideration of that all-ſufficient Sacrifice which he had provided. *Here was Love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and ſent his Son to be a Propitiation for our Sins.*

Thoſe heroically-virtuous and benevolent Actions, which have rendered the Names of Lawgivers and Philoſophers, of Heroes and Patriots,

Patriots, memorable and glorious, only extended their good Influence to particular Perſons or Communities; and thoſe too perhaps were ſuch as had either done them ſome good Turn, or at leaſt had never injured them. Whereas God, in the amazing Work of our Redemption, gave a glorious Diſplay of unlimited Goodneſs to all Mankind; including in his Scheme of Mercy and Benevolence not only ſuch as had ſincerely endeavoured to obey his Will, but alſo ſuch as had wilfully and preſumptuouſly tranſgreſſed it; and had not lived up to the Light and Knowledge which they had received. *Jews* and *Gentiles*, *Greeks* and *Samaritans*, *Publicans* and *Sinners*, all were invited to ſhare in the Benefits of Man's Redemption: For as all had Need of it, all were bleſſed by its ſalutary and reviving Influence.

And can any Thing more eminently diſplay the Glory of God, than an Act of ſuch extenſive, ſuch univerſal Benevolence, and that too exerciſed towards Creatures ſo very undeſerving of it? For conſider, Man, in what a happy Situation thy Creator firſt placed thee, what Privileges thou might have enjoyed in it, the Privileges of Life and Immortality, and a total Exemption from Death; conſider next how thou, by thy Tranſgreſ-

ſion,

ſion, forfeited that State, forfeited that Happineſs which thy Creator deſigned for thee, and wilfully ſubjected thyſelf to Death and Miſery; and conſider then, when thou hadſt brought thyſelf to this forlorn, deſponding Condition, when thou hadſt deprived thyſelf of all Hopes of Mercy and Forgiveneſs, how thy gracious Creator commiſerated thy Caſe, provided an Expedient for thy Recovery, and put it in thy Power, if thou art not ſhamefully wanting to thyſelf, of reinſtating thyſelf in the Divine Favour; conſider, I ſay, all this, and then, if thou canſt, forbear glorifying that Being, who has taken ſo much Pains to make thee happy, even when thou ſeemed obſtinately bent upon making thyſelf miſerable. That he created thee at all, was an Act of free Grace and Favour; that he created thee with ſuch Powers and Faculties as ennobled thy Nature, and gave thee a glorious Preeminence above the Creatures around thee, is ſtill an higher Inſtance of his Regard for thee; for thou wouldſt have had no juſt Reaſon of Complaint hadſt thou been placed in the very loweſt Claſs of Beings: But that he ſhould not only create thee and place thee in a Rank ſuperior to the reſt of the Creatures in this lower World, but alſo, after

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thou hadſt degraded thyſelf, and abuſed thoſe Powers which ennobled thy Nature, he ſhould even then contrive a Method for thy Recovery, and find an Expedient whereby thou mighteſt be delivered from the Bondage of Sin, which thou hadſt wilfully brought thyſelf into, is the moſt amazing, the moſt unparalleled Diſplay of Goodneſs, that can poſſibly be conceived. And therefore if Glory is to be aſcribed to any Being in Proportion to his Goodneſs, the Inſtance of it which God diſplayed in the Redemption of Mankind, muſt certainly proclaim him the moſt glorious Being in the Univerſe. For what is more great, more good, more glorious, than to offer Pardon and Forgiveneſs to a deſpairing Offender, who is deprived of all Hopes of Mercy, and to ſave a Creature devoted by his own Folly to Deſtruction, and who had no other Proſpect but that moſt dreadful one of Miſery and Death.

And as the Glory of God was never more ſignally diſplayed than in the Nativity of our bleſſed Saviour, and in the Redemption which was wrought for us by him; ſo we may likewiſe obſerve,

II. That every Thing he *did* and ſuffered, while dwelling among us, had a manifeſt Tendency to promote *Peace on Earth, and*

Good-will towards Men. And this will appear, whether we conſider his Life, his Doctrine, or his Death.

That his Life had a manifeſt Tendency to promote Peace and Good-will among Men, is evident from the whole Account we have of it in the Goſpel. We never find him cauſing Diſturbances nor fomenting Diviſions; but always endeavouring to reconcile Differences among People of ſeperate Intereſts and Perſuaſions; and to deſtroy as much as poſſible, all ill-natur'd Party-Diſtinctions, which have ever been deſtructive of the Welfare and Happineſs of Society. Whether he converſes with *Jews* or *Samaritans*, with *Proſelytes* or *Strangers*, the ſame Moderation and peaceable Diſpoſition, which are ever ready to forgive, and to put the moſt favourable Conſtruction upon Perſons and Things, run through his whole Behaviour. Nay, if we view him either in Publick or in Private, among his Friends or his Enemies, we ever find him ſubmitting to the Cuſtoms and Ordinances of Men, and even making Allowances to their Prejudices and Paſſions, as far as he could conſiſtently with Obedience to God. In Submiſſion to the governing Powers he pays Tribute, and conforms himſelf in every Particular to the

Laws

Laws of the State, in order that he might not by any Means occaſion Diſturbances, nor give the leaſt Countenance to Sedition or Rebellion. And as to religious Inſtitutions and Forms of Worſhip, theſe he readily complied with, that he might not ſeem to break through all Order, nor make light of Eſtabliſhments. And though the Religion, which he was to introduce into the World, was of a more ſpiritual Nature than that of the *Jewiſh*, which conſiſted moſtly of carnal Ordinances; yet he did not chooſe, for the ſake of introducing this ſpiritual Religion, to exclude theſe Ordinances all at once, but paid a becoming Regard to them, ſo long as they were only ſubſervient to the moral Law, and did not claim Preference to it. For he was circumciſed, and became obedient to the ceremonial Law for Man, to prevent giving him Offence, and to cut off all Occaſion of Wrangling and Contention about indifferent Matters, which have oftener blown up the Sparks of Diſſention, than Things of the utmoſt Importance, and wherein the very Eſſentials of Religion are concerned. Nor did he ſcruple to be preſent both in the Temple and the Synagogue, and to join there in all the Acts of divine Worſhip, cautiouſly avoiding every the leaſt Ap-

pearance of giving Countenance to a Contempt, or even Diſregard of ſuch Places, or of the Service performed in them: A Leſſon of Inſtruction this to People of different Opinions and Perſuaſions, teaching them with what Candour and Moderation they ought to behave themſelves towards one another.

And with regard to promoting Good-will among Men, that was the End to which the whole Buſineſs of his Life had an immediate Tendency. He went about doing Good; he was not content with the obvious Opportunities of expreſſing his Good-will towards them, but he goes in Queſt of ſuch as did not immediately offer themſelves, as he would not have met with, had he not been at the Pains of ſeeking for them. Nay, he not only takes the ordinary Methods of ſhewing his Benevolence, but alſo his Recourſe to extraordinary ones: He performs Miracles for that Purpoſe: *He makes the Blind to ſee, the Deaf to hear, the Dumb to ſpeak, the Lame to walk, and the Lepers to be cleanſed.*

And as his Life thus ſerved to promote Peace among Men, and was continually employed in Acts of Charity and Good-will towards them; ſo did his Doctrine contribute to the forwarding the ſame Labour of Love. In his excellent Sermon upon the Mount he pronounces

nounces ſeveral Bleſſings to the poor in Spirit, to the Meek, to the Merciful, and to the Peace-makers; all which are ſo many Encouragements to a quiet and peaceable Diſpoſition. And in the ſame Sermon, contrary to the Doctrine of Retaliation under the Law, which required *an Eye for an Eye, and a Tooth for a Tooth*, he thus expreſſes himſelf, *I ſay unto you, that ye reſiſt not Evil; but whoſoever ſhall ſmite thee on the right Cheek, turn to him the other alſo; and if any Man ſue thee at Law, and take away thy Coat, let him have thy Cloak alſo*; thereby teaching us, that in ſome Caſes we ſhould rather put up with ſlight Injuries and Affronts, than think of revenging ourſelves upon the Aggreſſor; and that it is better to bear them patiently, and even to recede from what is ſtrictly our Right, than to meditate Revenge and oppoſe Violence to Violence. Nay, both in Publick and Private, he ever had a View in his Doctrine to the promoting of Peace and the ſuppreſſing Contention. When this enſnaring Queſtion was put to him by the Phariſees, *Is it lawful to give Tribute unto Ceſar or not?* the Anſwer which he gave to it, namely, *Render unto Ceſar the Things which are Ceſars, and unto God the Things that are God's*, is the beſt Piece of Caſuiſtry that is

to be met with upon the Subject of Obedience to the ſuperior Powers. Theſe Powers he teaches us are to be ſubmitted to, ſo long as they enjoin us nothing that is contrary to the Law of God, and under this Reſtriction he intimates to us, that all their Injunctions are to be regarded in Subordination to that Law. Thus did he aſcertain Obedience and Submiſſion to the Civil Magiſtrate upon no leſs than Divine Authority, to the End that ſucceeding Generations might not think themſelves at Liberty, according as Humour or Caprice ſhould direct them, wantonly to unhinge and diſturb a ſettled Form of Government, and by that Means break in upon the Peace and Order of Society; but to pay a becoming Deference and Reſpect to thoſe who were entruſted with the Management of it.

And when his Diſciples would have had him to have called down Fire from Heaven upon the *Samaritans*, who refuſed to receive him, becauſe his Face was as if he would go to *Jeruſalem*, he turned and rebuked them with *Ye know not what Manner of Spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man came not to deſtroy Men's Lives, but to ſave them.* In ſhort, he ſeems in his Doctrine particularly to inculcate a peaceable and forgiving Temper,

per, as the *chief* Ornament and Glory of his Followers; labours to root out of their Breaſts all Rancour, Malice and Revenge, all tumultuous diſorderly Paſſions, which harraſs and diſturb the Peace of the World; and to plant *there*, in their Stead, Love and friendly Agreement, Charity and univerſal Benevolence, which he knew to be the only Guardians of Society and the Supporters of Order.

Nor, laſtly, did his Death leſs contribute to the advancing and encouraging Peace and Good-will among Men, than his Life and Doctrine. For by his Death, and the Sacrifice which he voluntarily made of himſelf, he baniſhed from Men's Minds thoſe uneaſy, deſponding Thoughts, about the Efficacy of their Repentance, which were Enemies to their inward Quiet; and refreſhed their Souls with the comfortable Hopes of having their Sins pardoned through Faith in his Blood. And ſurely nothing could contribute more to make Men eaſy and at Peace with themſelves, and with all around them, than the Conſideration that they have it in their Power to be at Peace with their Maker, that they are through Chriſt reconciled unto him, and admitted into Terms of Mercy and Acceptance. Without this Conſideration, every Thing

about them muſt have look'd gloomy and melancholy, and their beſt Enjoyments would have had a diſagreeable Mixture of Anguiſh and Sorrow infuſed into them. Whereas our Saviour, by putting us in a Capacity of enjoying the Divine Favour, has given us a higher Reliſh for every other Enjoyment, has diſpelled that Gloom which before overcaſt our Minds, and by his meritorious Death and Paſſion has raiſed in us the enlivening Hopes of everlaſting Life.

And with regard to Good-will, what can more powerfully recommend it, than this Conſideration, that Chriſt died for our Sakes, to make Satisfaction for our Sins. It is reckoned among Men a very extraordinary Inſtance of Good-will, for a Man to lay down his Life for his Friend; but what is this when compared with the Good-will of our Saviour, who died for his very Enemies, for thoſe from whom he had met with the worſt of Uſage, and whom he came *to ſeek and to ſave*. If this is not an Inſtance of Good-will, there never was certainly any ſuch Thing in the World; and if this does not raiſe in us a generous Regard and Benevolence for our Fellow-Creatures, who were all Sharers of the ſame Guilt, and Partakers of the ſame Mercy; we muſt conclude our-

ſelves

ſelves loſt to all tender, humane Sentiments, and every Way qualified, had we only Opportunity, for *crucifying afreſh the Son of God, and putting him once more to open Shame.*

All that now remains, is, from what has been ſaid, to make ſome Reflections that may be applicable to ourſelves at this ſolemn Seaſon. And,

1*ſt.* If, as we have ſeen, the Glory of God was never more ſignally diſplayed than in the Nativity of our bleſſed Saviour, and the Redemption which was wrought for us by him; let us take Care that we do not eclipſe and throw a Shade over that Glory, by behaving ourſelves unworthy of ſo great a Mercy. We cannot, indeed, ſtrictly ſpeaking, darken or obſcure the Glory of God; for that in Reality will ever ſhine with unſullied, undiminiſhed Luſtre, before the Face of Men and Angels. But then we may be ſaid to eclipſe it, when we do not ſeem to have a Regard to it in our Actions, nor by that Means make it manifeſt to the World. And ſurely we can but have but little Regard to the Glory of God remarkably diſplayed in the Redemption of the World, if, when at the very Time he ſent his Son to deliver us from the Bondage of Sin, we are more than ordinarily buſied in entangling ourſelves in

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it. The Son of God was manifeſted in the Fleſh, that he might *deſtroy the Works of the Devil*; and can we, in direct Oppoſition to ſo gracious a Deſign, make his Manifeſtation an Occaſion of promoting and encouraging thoſe very Works? Can we indulge ourſelves in Rioting and Drunkenneſs, in Intemperance and Debauchery, for twelve Days together, when theſe are the very Vices which our Saviour came to aboliſh. It is a ſtrange prepoſterous Way of honouring God for ſending his Son, as at this Time, to redeem us from Sin; thus to run, as it were, headlong into the Commiſſion of it. We could not poſſibly have behaved otherwiſe, had Chriſt by his Coming given us a full Licence to practiſe Ungodlineſs; and yet the Intent of his Coming was *to purify to himſelf a peculiar People, zealous of good Works; to teach Men to deny all Ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent World.*

Let us then, as we have any Regard to the Glory of God, and would not defeat his gracious Deſign of ſending his Son to redeem us from Sin and to make us happy; behave ourſelves in ſuch a Manner at this ſolemn Seaſon, as not to reflect any Diſhonour upon him by our wicked and immoral Practices,

by

by our acting contrary to, and even fruſtrating, as much as in us lies, his gracious Intention. But let our whole Conduct be ſuch, as that out of a Senſe of Gratitude for ſo great Salvation, *our Light may ſo ſhine before Men, that they may ſee our good Works*, our Works of Piety and Charity, and by that Means may be induced *to glorify our Father which is in Heaven.*

Again, if the Life, Doctrine, and Death of our bleſſed Saviour had a manifeſt Tendency to promote Peace on Earth, and Good-will among Men; let us in Conformity thereto, endeavour that our Actions may principally have Reſpect to the ſame charitable End. If his Life was one continued Inſtance of a quiet and peaceable Behaviour, if he condeſcended to fall in with the indifferent but prevailing Cuſtoms of the Times, that ſo he might cut off all Occaſions of Offence, and give no Pretence to his Followers of raiſing Diſturbances; if, in ſhort, it was the great Buſineſs of his Life to live well with all whom he happened to converſe with, and not merely for the Sake of Oppoſition break in upon the Peace and Order of Society; let us, as we profeſs ourſelves to be his true, not pretended, Diſciples, make his Example herein the Rule of our Conduct.

Let

Let us pay a becoming Deference and Submiſſion to our Superiors and Governors, an obliging and courteous Reſpect to our Equals, and a well-meant, unexceptionable Civility to all. Faction and Diſcord would then diſappear, and Peace and good Neighbourhood would every where flouriſh. The State would not then feel the violent Shocks of contending Parties; nor private Perſons thoſe Miſchiefs and Inconveniences which ariſe from ungovernable Paſſions, from Quarrels and Diſputes.

If again, the Doctrine of our Saviour teaches and enforces what he practiſed in his Life, and moſt ſtrongly recommends that peaceable Behaviour, which his own Example is the beſt Illuſtration of and Comment upon; let us mind and attend to what he teaches us on that Subject; for by that Means we ſhall beſt conſult our own Quiet, and moſt effectually contribute to the Welfare and Happineſs of the World.

If, laſtly, by Chriſt's Death we were reconciled to God, and delivered from thoſe ſlaviſh uneaſy Apprehenſions, which Men unavoidably labour'd under before his Coming; let us not, by our own Folly and obſtinate Behaviour, deprive ourſelves of the Benefits of his meritorious Death and Paſ-

ſion;

ſion; but let us ſecond the gracious Efforts of Divine Goodneſs towards promoting our everlaſting Peace, by our own Piety and Virtue. And as there was never ſuch a glorious Inſtance of Good-will exhibited to the World as in the Redemption of Mankind, let us, as we have all had very ſenſible Experience of it, not fail of exerciſing the ſame benevolent Diſpoſition toward our Fellow-Creatures. For if God ſo loved us, who ſo little deſerved his Love, as to lay down his Life for us, ſurely we ought not to think it a Difficulty to love one another, to have a mutual Friendſhip and Affection for our Brethren, and to expreſs this our Affection by correſpondent Acts of Charity and Humanity. The Conſideration that we are all the Redeemed of the Lord, that we have all ſhared in the Benefits of his Death, ſhould be a perpetual Call upon us, to love as Brethren; ſhould be a Bond of Peace and of every ſocial Virtue among Chriſtians, and prove an effectual Remedy againſt all Diviſions and Contentions. Indeed it is a Shame and Scandal to our holy Religion, and gives great Occaſion to the Enemies of the Lord to blaſpheme it, to ſee the Profeſſors of it actuated by a Spirit of Diſſention, and diſcharging their Spite and Ill-will upon one another

another in the moſt cruel and barbarous Treatment. And therefore, as you would render yourſelves deſerving of ſo great a Mercy, *let all Bitterneſs, and Wrath, and Anger, and Clamour, and Evil-ſpeaking, be put away from you, with all Malice. And be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's Sake hath forgiven you.* Thus ſhall you approve yourſelves to be true and faithful Followers of a meek and forgiving Jeſus, paſs through this World with Comfort and Satisfaction to yourſelves, amidſt the various Changes and Chances of it, and ſhall when you leave it, be received into the peaceable Society of juſt Men made perfect, there to live and be happy to all Eternity.

SER-

SERMON XVI.

On Easter-Day.

ROM. i. 4.

And declared to be the Son of God with Power according to the Spirit of Holineſs, by the Reſurrection from the Dead.

THERE ſeems to be a particular Propriety in the Doctrine of Chriſt's Reſurrection, when eſtabliſhed and confirmed, to convince Mankind of the Truth of Chriſtianity. If we conſider it in Reſpect of the *Jews*, we ſhall find that it is admirably adapted for removing thoſe Prejudices, which they entertained againſt

againſt a ſuffering Meſſiah. *Chriſt crucified* was to them a *Stumbling-block*. They had all along flattered themſelves, that the Meſſiah was to make his Appearance in all the Pomp of worldly Grandeur, that, he was to be a mighty victorious Prince, who ſhould deliver their Nation from the *Roman* Yoke, and recover to them thoſe Privileges, which they had formerly enjoyed. Theſe were Notions and Expectations, which were but ill-ſuited with the Circumſtances and Condition of *Jeſus* of *Nazareth*. That a Man born of obſcure Parents, of an ordinary Occupation, and who had no other Retinue to attend him but a Company of poor Fiſhermen and Mechanicks, ſhould be that Divine Perſon, whom their vain Imaginations had arrayed in all the Glories of Majeſty, was a Truth which they could not at all reliſh. Their ambitious Views would only ſuffer them to attend to thoſe ſublime Deſcriptions of a triumphant Meſſiah, which were given them by their Prophets; but tempted them to overlook *ſuch*, as more immediately pointed out his Sufferings and Death. Tho', by their wilful Inattention to the plain Predictions in their Scriptures concerning his Sufferings and Death, they became the very Inſtruments of accompliſhing them.

But

But now Chriſt's Riſing from the Dead muſt needs remove the Scandal of the Croſs, and baniſh thoſe Prepoſſeſſions which the Lowneſs of his Circumſtances, and the mercileſs Treatment he met with, both in Life and Death, had raiſed againſt him. For this one Act of Omnipotence declared him to be the Son of God with Power; ſince God would never have ſuffered him to exert it, had he been an Impoſtor. And it likewiſe ſhews, that thoſe two Characters, of a ſuffering and triumphant Meſſiah, ſeemingly ſo oppoſite, and which the Pride of the *Jews* endeavoured to keep aſunder, met together and were united in the ſame *Jeſus*. For it was the ſame *Jeſus* that was born in a Stable, that ſuffered ſo much from the Malice and Ill-will of Men, and died upon the Croſs; and alſo the ſame *Jeſus* that overcame Death, vanquiſhed the Powers of Darkneſs, and glorioufly roſe from the Grave. And however the *Jews* might deſpiſe and reject him on Account of his mean Appearance, and the contemptible Figure he made in the World; yet there was ſomething in his Reſurrection, which ſo well anſwered the triumphant Deſcription their Prophets gave of him, as that they could not but ſuſpect that they had been miſtaken in the Senſe and Application

of other Scriptures which equally related to him. For an Agreement in this Part of his Character with the Prophecies, would naturally put them upon enquiring, whether the ſame Agreement was not to be found as to other Parts of it. And it is probable, upon Examination, that the moſt ingenuous and well diſpoſed among them, did ſee and were convinced of this Agreement: For it appears from the Goſpel, as alſo from the Acts of the Apoſtles, that more *Jews* were perſuaded that *Jeſus* was the *Chriſt* from the Preaching of his Reſurrection, and other Arguments dependant upon it, than by any other Arguments whatſoever. Even the Chief Prieſts, whoſe Intereſt it was to deny our Saviour to be the Meſſiah, were well aware how much the Belief of his Reſurrection would contribute to confirm the Truth of his Meſſiahſhip: And accordingly we find, that when the Watch, which were appointed to guard the Sepulchre, brought them Intelligence of what had happened, they immediately held a Conſultation with the Elders upon it; the Reſult of which was, that, to prevent the Fact from getting Air, they agreed to give the Soldiers Money in order that they might ſpread this falſe Report among the People, *That his Diſciples*

came

came by Night and ſtole him away, while they ſlept. Which artful Behaviour of the Chief Prieſts and Elders, is a plain and convincing Proof what great Importance, they thought, the Belief of Chriſt's Reſurrection was of towards making Men believe him to be the Meſſiah; and alſo ſhews, that they themſelves were convinced of the Truth of it; otherwiſe they need not to have had Recourſe to ſuch indirect Methods of ſuppreſſing it. For had they not been ſatisfied that Chriſt was riſen, they would never have given Money to have perſuaded the World that he was not; ſince ſuch Arts are only employed to propagate Deceit, not to eſtabliſh and ſupport Truth.

And with regard to the *Gentiles*, nothing could be better calculated to make them enquire into, and, after Enquiry, to believe in, the Doctrines of Chriſtianity, than the Reſurrection of our Saviour: which will appear if we conſider the Place where this Event happened, and the Nature of the Event itſelf.

The Event happened at *Jeruſalem*, the Metropolis of *Judea*, whither Men of all Nations and Languages under Heaven conſtantly reſorted. Theſe Men therefore, who happened to be upon the Spot at that Time, could not be unacquainted with the Rumour

which was ſpread abroad there, and which by Reaſon of its Strangeneſs, would naturally be the Subject of every Converſation. And as they had none of thoſe particular Prejudices upon their Minds concerning the Fact reported, which the *Jews* laboured under, they were better prepared for giving it a fair and impartial Examination. Their Curioſity, if they had not a more intereſting Motive, would certainly lead them to enquire about the Circumſtances of ſo extraordinary an Affair, and not ſuffer them to be entirely inattentive or indifferent to an Event, in which they ſaw the Chief Prieſts and Elders of the *Jews* were ſo much concerned, as to hold a formal Conſultation upon it. Indeed it cannot be doubted, but that, conſidering them only as Men of common Curioſity, they would not let an Affair, which made ſo much Noiſe in *Jeruſalem*, paſs unnoticed. Nor is it leſs to be doubted, but that ſo many concurrent Proofs of its Truth and Reality, which they had the faireſt Opportunities of coming to the Knowledge of, would have their full Weight upon Minds that had no particular Intereſt to ſerve in diſbelieving it; and accordingly could not fail of producing in them certain Conviction. The Place then, you ſee, which was the Scene of this Event,

was

was extremely well ſuited to make the *Gentiles*, who reſided at *Jeruſalem* at the particular Time when the Event happened, to enquire into its Pretenſions, and gave them alſo an Opportunity of furniſhing themſelves with Arguments in its Favour.

But the Nature of the Event itſelf, thus proved to the *Gentiles*, was the ſtrongeſt Evidence that could poſſibly be given them, of the Truth of Chriſtianity. When they heard that *Jeſus*, who died upon the Croſs and was buried, roſe again the third Day, that the ſame *Jeſus* while he was alive foretold this of himſelf with the utmoſt Exactneſs, and likewiſe that he reſted the whole Truth of his Religion upon the Accompliſhment of this Prediction; they could not when they heard all this, and were alſo convinced of the Truth of what they heard, refuſe acknowledging that *Jeſus* was the divine Perſon he declared himſelf to be, and that the Doctrines which he taught, as well as he the Teacher of them, *came from God*. For it muſt be inconſiſtent with all the Notions they had of the Deity, to ſuppoſe that he would diſplay ſuch an amazing Act of Omnipotence, and ſo contrary to all the known Laws of Nature, for the Support and Confirmation of an Impoſture. And yet

this would have been the Caſe, had God given ſuch extraordinary Atteſtation to the Truth of our Saviour's Pretenſions, when at the ſame Time theſe Pretenſions were falſe. So that the very Suppoſition that God was concerned in the Reſurrection of Chriſt, muſt be an undeniable Argument to them of the Truth of thoſe Doctrines, and of that Religion, of which this one Act of Omnipotence was purpoſely performed as an Atteſtation.

Nor is it to be queſtioned, but that thoſe Heathens, when they returned to their reſpective Homes, would give ſo circumſtantial an Account of this Affair, as that their Countrymen would nearly have the ſame Grounds for believing it, as if they had likewiſe been upon the Spot, and had the ſame Opportunities of enquiring into it. For the Relation of Perſons concerning an Event, to the Belief of which they could have no other Bias except what a Regard to Truth gave them, could not be ſuſpected of the leaſt Partiality. By which Means the Credit of Chriſtianity, which depended upon, and was connected with, the Belief of this one Event, would gain Ground among the *Gentiles*, and prepare them for giving it a more favourable Hearing, when it came to be

be fairly propounded to them by its appointed Teachers. And it is worth while here to obſerve, that the Doctrine of the Reſurrection, when preached among them, did command their more than ordinary Attention; and it is probable that the Apoſtles, knowing how well it was adapted to convince Mankind of the Truth of that Religion, which they were commiſſioned to propagate, did more particularly inſiſt, and laid greater Streſs upon it, than upon any other Doctrine.

Thus have we ſeen what an admirable Propriety and Fitneſs there is in the Doctrine of Chriſt's Reſurrection, when heard and propounded, to reconcile both *Jews* and *Gentiles* to the Belief of Chriſtianity. But we have hitherto done little more than gone upon Preſumptions, and have taken the Thing for granted: For our further and more rational Satisfaction therefore let us ſee, what real Proof we have of the Reſurrection of our Saviour.

As for the Proof of our Saviour's Reſurrection, it will not be neceſſary to mention particularly the Prophecies in the *Old-Teſtament* relating to it; the References to thoſe Prophecies in the *New* are ſo plain, and the Event again ſo exactly anſwers in every

Reſpect to the Predictions, that thoſe who are at all acquainted with both Teſtaments, and the Writings of the Apoſtles, cannot poſſibly be miſtaken as to the Application. For the Prophecies point out ſo clearly the Event; and the Accompliſhment of the Event itſelf, with the particular Circumſtances attending it, reflect Light ſo ſtrongly back upon the Prophecies, as that each of them mutually conſpire to ſtrengthen our Faith, and to confirm our Belief in this important Article.

It may however be ſufficient for our Conviction, without entering into a minute Examination of theſe Prophecies, to dwell only upon ſuch Arguments, as a bare Recital of the Facts laid down in the Goſpel will furniſh us with. For this will give us all the Satisfaction, with regard to the Truth of our Saviour's Reſurrection, that the Teſtimony of Men, the Teſtimony of Angels, and the Teſtimony of God himſelf, can poſſibly afford us. And here let us firſt conſult human Teſtimony upon it, and ſee what Degree of Credit it demands from us on that Kind of Evidence. Now the Evidence of this Kind is ſo very full and clear, as that we cannot refuſe our Aſſent to it, without denying our Aſſent to the plaineſt Matters

of

of Fact, related in the plaineſt and moſt artleſs Manner.

The firſt Teſtimony of Chriſt's Reſurrection we have from the Women, who early the firſt Day of the Week went to the Sepulchre, and not finding his Body there, were ſoon after convinced, by his appearing to them, and converſing with them, that he was riſen from the Dead. The next Teſtimony is from his Diſciples, who, not long after the Report made by the Women, had a ſenſible Demonſtration of the Truth of the Report: For he appeared firſt to two of them in their Way towards Emmaus; next to the Eleven as they ſat at Meat; and, for the Conviction of *Thomas*, who happened to be abſent when he came, and would not therefore believe; he appeared to them again when *Thomas* was with them, and gave him ſuch Proofs as entirely removed his Incredulity. He was likewiſe ſeen of above five hundred Brethren at once, among whom he converſed for forty Days together; and laſtly by St. *Paul* at the Time of his Converſion. Nor have we only the Teſtimony of his Friends and Followers, but alſo of his Enemies: Some of the Watch came into the City, and ſhewed unto the Chief Prieſts all the Things that were done.

And

And leſt the Teſtimony of both Friends and Enemies ſhould not be ſufficient, we have the Teſtimony of Angels, who declared to the Women that he was riſen, and bad them remember how he ſpake unto them, when he was yet in *Galilee*, ſaying, *The Son of Man muſt be delivered into the Hands of ſinful Men, and be crucified, and the third Day riſe again.*

But to put the Matter beyond all Diſpute with Regard to the Reſurrection of our Saviour; we have the Witneſs of God Himſelf, inaſmuch as nothing but Omnipotence and his Almighty Power could have poſſibly performed it. And God likewiſe gave Atteſtation to the ſame Truth by ſending down his Spirit upon the Apoſtles according to our Saviour's Declaration; *The Spirit of Truth which proceedeth from the Father, he ſhall teſtify of me*: And yet had not our Saviour been riſen, he could not have ſent that Spirit from the Father, nor conſequently, would it have teſtified of him. Beſides, God by the extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit to the Apoſtles, gave the ſtrongeſt Evidence to Mankind that could be of Chriſt's Reſurrection: For the Apoſtles were thereby enabled to diſplay ſo many and ſuch infallible Proofs of the Truth of it, and were inſpired with ſuch a Share of Conſtancy

and

and Reſolution to withſtand all Oppoſition, as that nothing but the greateſt Obſtinacy and Malice could have reſiſted their Teſtimony; a Teſtimony, which, when they were put to the Trial, they refuſed not to ſeal with their very Blood.

If it be ſaid that all this Evidence which we have produced reſts chiefly upon the Authorities of Friends, whoſe Intereſt it was to have it believed, and therefore not to be relied on; it will be a ſufficient Anſwer to obſerve, that it cannot be ſuppoſed a few Followers and Friends of a deſpiſed and crucified Jeſus, ſhould ever be able to perſuade ſo many Enemies as they every where met with, of the Truth of Chriſt's Reſurrection, had it been a Falſity. A Doctrine, upon which depended the very Being of a new Religion, ſo oppoſite to the prevailing Vices and Opinions of both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, muſt have come ſupported with undeniable Evidence; otherwiſe, it muſt have been immediately ſuppreſſed, and its Preachers treated as Impoſtors ought to be treated, with the utmoſt Severity. For can it be imagined, Mankind would tamely look on, while a new Religion was making its Way in the World upon the Strength of a Forgery; when they had it in their Power ſo eaſily to have detected it.

This

This will appear incredible to any one who conſiders how jealous Men always have been with Regard to any Innovations in Religion: Indeed, it would be a greater Miracle than our Saviour's Reſurrection itſelf, to ſuppoſe that any Thing leſs than the moſt undeniable Evidence could gain it at firſt Credit in the World, or hinder it from being entirely quaſhed: And it muſt be the Force of Truth that made it prevail, when it had ſo many Obſtacles and Difficulties to ſtruggle with, ariſing from the Malice and Prejudices of Mankind.

Should it be further urged, that the above-mentioned circumſtantial Evidence of our Saviour's Reſurrection, may poſſibly be falſe as to ſome of the Particulars of it; at leaſt, that it cannot be of equal Authority with us at this Diſtance of Time; I ſhall only anſwer, that this is ſetting a bare Poſſibility without any Reaſon for it, againſt a ſtrong Probability: It is certainly moſt probable, that the ſame Evidence which we find in the Goſpel for Chriſt's Reſurrection, and which gained it Belief at firſt in Spite of the obſtiſtinate Malice of Men, was the very Evidence by which the Belief of it was afterwards propagated, and by which it is continued down to the preſent Times.

As

As to the Authenticity of the original Evidence, it cannot at all be doubted, if we conſider, that when the Canon of the New Teſtament was firſt fixed, there could be no Poſſibility of inſerting any the leaſt Forgery in it: The Facts which compoſed it, were then freſh in every Body's Memory; ſo that had any of them been falſe, they would ſoon have been detected, and the whole would have been exploded. Beſides, it's Enemies would have been glad to have had ſo material a Charge againſt it; ſince, if it had been plainly fixed upon, it would, undoubtedly, have deſtroyed its Credit and Authority. And as the original Evidence of Chriſt's Reſurrection was certainly authentic, ſo it cannot be conceived, how the Evidence afterwards could be altered in the Conveyance. There were numberleſs Copies immediately taken of the New Teſtament, which contained this original Evidence: Theſe Copies were tranſlated into ſeveral Languages, were depoſited in ſeveral Churches, and were conſtantly appealed to by Chriſtians of all Denominations for their clearing up Differences. If any Errors ſhould have crept into After-copies thro' the Careleſſneſs or Ignorance of Tranſcribers, they muſt ſoon have been rectified by having Recourſe either to the Original itſelf, or to the

the firſt Copies of it. And it is moſt probable that Miſtakes of any Conſequence were by this Means avoided: For we find as to material Doctrines the preſent Copies are the ſame with the antient ones; and that no fundamental Article of Faith has undergone any the leaſt Alteration. Thoſe therefore who are ſo very ſuſpicious about Forgeries having corrupted the original Evidence of Chriſt's Reſurrection; ſhould be very particular in pointing out, both the Time when, and the Manner how, ſuch Corruptions happened; otherwiſe their Suſpicions can never invalidate ſuch a connected Series of Evidence as has been handed down to us from the Beginnings of Chriſtianity, and all along ſupported by the beſt Authorities. Indeed, the very Exiſtence of Chriſtianity at preſent among us, is a ſtanding Argument of the Truth of Chriſt's Reſurrection; and ſhews at leaſt that there muſt be ſomething extraordinary in the Evidence for it, that could carry it through ſo much Oppoſition, and make it prevail againſt the combined Powers, againſt the obſtinate Malice of both Men and Devils. For it is inconceivable, how a Religion which gained Credit at firſt by the Strength of that inconteſtable Evidence which attended his Reſurrection, ſhould be propagated or eſtabliſhed

after-

afterwards, any other Way but by the ſame Evidence. Had it not been true, we cannot imagine how it could paſs uninterrupted, eſpecially as the Doctrine it gave Teſtimony to, was the leading Doctrine of a Religion, and alſo the grand Support of that Religion, againſt which both *Jews* and *Gentiles* entertained the moſt inveterate Prejudices. This very Evidence, however, we can trace backward and forward, from the Beginning of Chriſtianity, thro' the ſucceeding Ages of it down to its preſent State, and ſtill find it to be equally ſtrong: So that the Article of Chriſt's Reſurrection ſtands upon ſuch an immoveable Foundation, has ſuch an undeniable Evidence to ſupport it from the very Birth of Chriſtianity through its ſubſequent Progreſs in the World, as that the Gates of Hell have never yet been able to prevail againſt it, either by weakening its Authority, or deſtroying its Credibility. In ſhort, as long as Chriſtianity exiſts, we ſhall never want Arguments to confirm us in the Truth of our Saviour's Reſurrection; ſince the Evidence for both is ſo cloſely connected, that they muſt unavoidably ſtand or fall together.

If then, as we have ſeen, Chriſt be riſen, what remains, but that we apply ſuch Conſidera-

tions

tions to ourſelves, to our own Uſe, as the Belief of it will naturally ſuggeſt to us. If it aſcertains to us the Truth of our Religion, and puts the Evidence in Favour of it upon the moſt ſatisfactory Footing, let us hold faſt the Profeſſion of our *Faith without wavering*, and diſcard at once all thoſe novel Schemes which are calculated to undermine it. For ſuch is the Strength and Clearneſs of that Evidence, which this one Article furniſhes us with, that every ingenuous, unprejudiced Mind cannot fail of having, upon Examination, the moſt rational Conviction from it.

If again, we are aſſured by Chriſt's Reſurrection, that God will accept what he did and ſuffered in our Stead as an Atonement for our Sins, and that we ſhall be juſtified or accounted righteous in the Sight of our heavenly Father through the alone ſufficient Merits of our Saviour; yet we are to remember, that the Benefits of Chriſt's Death and Reſurrection can by no Means be applied to us, unleſs we *die to Sin and riſe again to Righteouſneſs*. For in vain do we expect, unleſs we have *been planted together in the Likeneſs of his Death, that we ſhall be alſo in the Likeneſs of his Reſurrection*. In vain do we expect to obtain Pardon for our Sins, unleſs we

take

take Care to walk in *Newneſs of Life. Knowing this*, as the Apoſtle argues, *that our old Man is crucified with him, that the Body of Sin might be deſtroyed, that henceforth we ſhould not ſerve Sin. For we muſt reckon ourſelves to be dead indeed unto Sin, before we can hope to be alive unto God, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Let not Sin therefore reign in your mortal Body, that ye ſhould obey it in the Luſts thereof: Neither yield you your Members as Inſtruments of Unrighteouſneſs unto Sin; but yield yourſelves unto God, as thoſe that are alive from the Dead; and your Members as Inſtruments of Righteouſneſs unto God.*

If, laſtly, the Reſurrection of our Saviour be a Pledge and Aſſurance of our own Reſurrection, as he declares it to be, and confirms our Belief in a future State, let us lead ſuch Lives, as to make that State happy and deſirable to us; and let our whole Conduct be an Argument, that our Actions are influenced by the joyful Expectation of a glorious Reſurrection unto Life eternal. 'Tis true, all Men ſhall riſe again; but then 'tis equally true, that ſome ſhall riſe to the Reſurrection of Life, and ſome to the Reſurrection of Condemnation. Thoſe who

made it their chief Buſineſs, while upon Earth, to *mortify the Fleſh, with the Affections and Luſts, to die to Sin, and riſe again unto Righteouſneſs*; and to pay an uniform, conſtant Obedience to all God's Laws, without indulging themſelves in any known Habit of Vice, may reaſonably expect a ſuitable Reward at the Reſurrection of the Juſt: Their Bodies ſhall riſe again glorified and purged of all material Droſs, and ſhall, when united to their proper Souls, greatly contribute to the Happineſs of the whole Man. But thoſe, who knowingly and wilfully tranſgreſſed their Duty, and only *made Proviſion for the Fleſh, to fulfil the Luſts thereof*; the Bodies of ſuch ſhall indeed riſe again, but ſhall be utterly diſqualified for enjoying the ſpiritual refined Happineſs of a future State. In order therefore that we may be fit Subjects of a glorious Reſurrection unto Life eternal, let us, according to the Apoſtle's Advice, *cleanſe ourſelves from all Filthineſs of Fleſh and Spirit, perfecting Holineſs in the Fear of God.* And let us be *ſtedfaſt, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord*; and then we may be aſſured, that *our Labour ſhall not* finally *be in vain in the Lord.*

Now

Now the God of Peace that brought again from the Dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the Blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good Work to do his Will, working in you that which is pleasing in his Sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory for ever and ever.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

PAge 3, line 5, *dele* our. Ibid. l. 8. wants, *read* want: P. 27, l. 16, appears, *read* appear. P. 33, l. 17, Period, *read* Periods. P. 40, l. 17, more, *read* mere. P. 44, l. 13, Teſt, *read* Text. P. 80, l. 3, had in, *read* had it in. P. 154, laſt l. Effect, *read* Effects. P. 175, l. 2, Man, *read* Men. P. 196, l. 20, natural, *read* unnatural. P. 204, l. 19. Tracts, *read* Tracks. P. 237, firſt line, out the more, *read* out more. *Ibid.* laſt line but one, as it, *read* as that it. P. 244, l. 4, after Miſery a Colon: P. 267, l. 18, *dele* the. P. 275. l. 4, without it, *read* without that it is. P. 281, l. 2, they, *read* and. P. 313, l. 24. *dele* but. P. 333, l. 13. fixed upon, *read* fixed upon it.

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